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THE CROWDED SKY



TOP

**SOCCER STAR
BOBBY
CHARLTON...**



writes a "top" football story about



**...that top
football
character—
"ROY of the
ROVERS"...**

every week in

TIGER

Tuesdays—4½d.

★ *All boys vote—"IT'S **TOPS!**"*

The **CROWDED SKY**

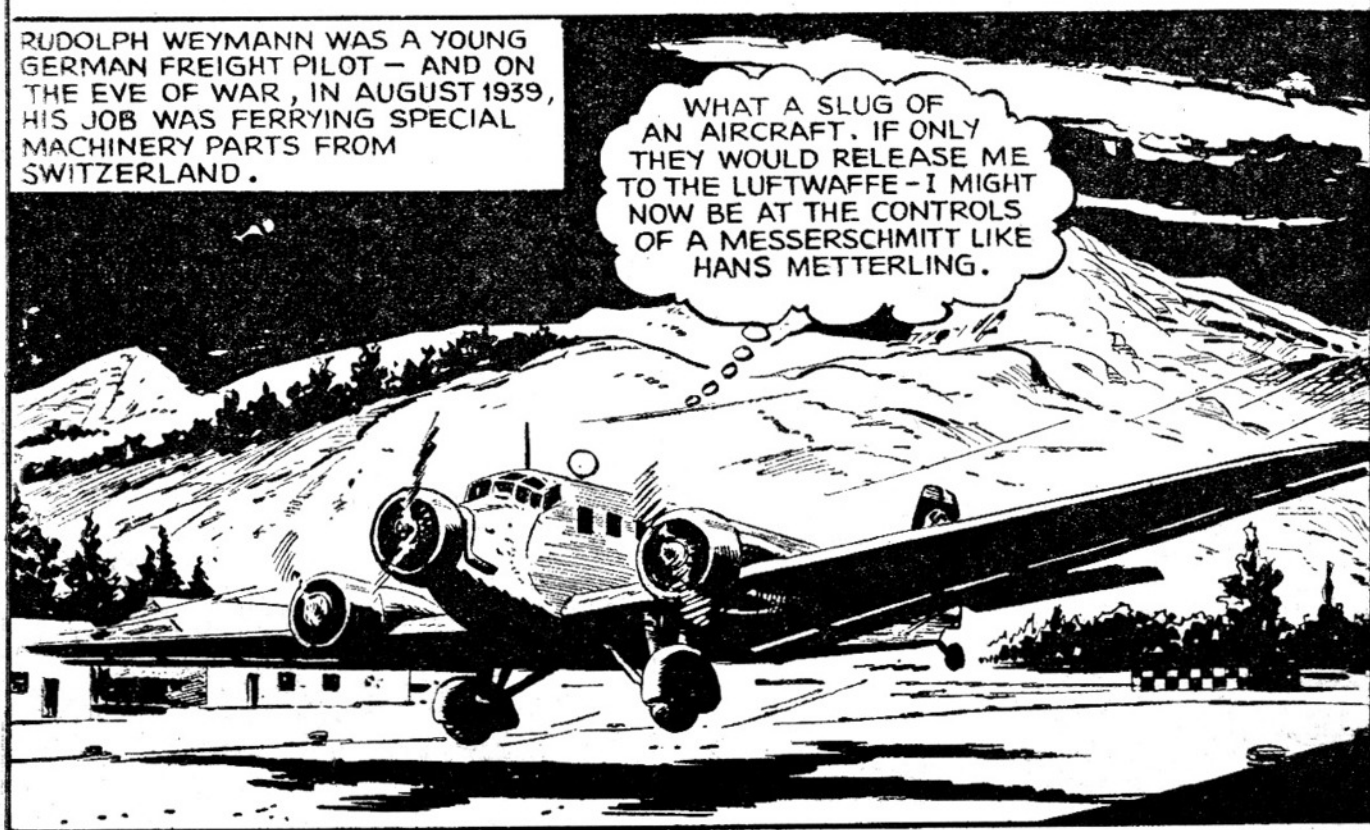
THIS IS THE STORY OF RUDOLPH WEYMANN, LATER KNOWN IN THE BLENHEIM SQUADRONS OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE AS JOE ARKWRIGHT. IT TELLS OF THE ODDS HE FOUGHT AGAINST AND THE BRIEF MOMENT OF GLORY HE FOUND IN THE CROWDED SKY.



Chapter 1. THE HATED GESTAPO

RUDOLPH WEYMANN WAS A YOUNG GERMAN FREIGHT PILOT — AND ON THE EVE OF WAR, IN AUGUST 1939, HIS JOB WAS FERRYING SPECIAL MACHINERY PARTS FROM SWITZERLAND.

WHAT A SLUG OF AN AIRCRAFT. IF ONLY THEY WOULD RELEASE ME TO THE LUFTWAFFE — I MIGHT NOW BE AT THE CONTROLS OF A MESSERSCHMITT LIKE HANS METTERLING.



WEYMANN WAS NOT A NAZI, BUT HE WAS A PATRIOTIC YOUNG GERMAN — AND THE DULL FERRYING FLIGHTS IN A HEAVY JUNKERS TRANSPORT BETWEEN BERLIN AND BERNE WERE IRKSOME TO HIM.

SCHMITT! THE PORT ENGINE RESPONSE IS POSITIVELY FOUL. HOW CAN YOU EXPECT ME TO CLEAR THE MOUNTAINS WITH A HEAVY LOAD WHEN I HAVEN'T GOT POWER? YOU'D BETTER SEE TO IT — NOW!

VERY GOOD, HERR WEYMANN — WE'LL STRIP THE ENGINE.



The Crowded Sky

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NORMALLY, WEYMANN WOULD CHAT WITH PILOTS FROM OTHER AIRLINES - FOR HIS ENGLISH AND FRENCH WERE GOOD. BUT THE THREAT OF THE COMING WAR HAD STRAINED RELATIONS BETWEEN THE CIVILIAN FLYERS.

THAT'S HIM - HIS NAME IS WEYMANN. HE CAME IN WITH THE JUNKERS AN HOUR AGO.

YOU STAY HERE. I'LL APPROACH HIM AND DO THE TALKING. I KNOW IT'S RISKY - BUT WE'VE GOT TO TAKE A CHANCE.



THE PILOT LOOKED UP FROM HIS NEWSPAPER TO SEE A PORTLY LITTLE BUSINESS MAN STANDING TIMIDLY BY HIS TABLE...

MISTER WEYMANN?

THAT'S ME - SO...?

EXCUSE ME SPEAKING ENGLISH, MISTER WEYMANN - I AM A GERMAN LIKE YOURSELF - BUT I AM GOING TO ASK YOU SOMETHING IMPORTANT, AND IT MIGHT BE DANGEROUS FOR BOTH OF US IF ANOTHER GERMAN WERE TO OVERHEAR.



The Crowded Sky

THE LITTLE MAN BEGAN TO TALK - AND WEYMANN, ASTONISHED, FOUND HIMSELF LISTENING TO A FANTASTIC TALE OF BRUTALITY AND PERSECUTION. THIS MAN HAD BEEN HUNTED BY THE GESTAPO IN VIENNA, BUT HAD MANAGED TO ELUDE THEM AND ESCAPE INTO SWITZERLAND. BUT, HIS FAMILY, HOWEVER, HAD NOT BEEN ABLE TO GET ACROSS THE SWISS FRONTIER, AND HAD GONE INTO HIDING IN AUSTRIA . . .

I HAVE MADE SECRET ARRANGEMENTS TO FLY MY FAMILY OUT OF AUSTRIA BEFORE THE GESTAPO FIND THEM. WE HAD A PILOT WHO KNEW THE COUNTRY - BUT HE IS ILL. THEREFORE I IMPORE YOU TO TAKE HIS PLACE. IT WILL ONLY TAKE A FEW HOURS - AND I WILL PAY YOU WELL . . .

YOU'RE ASKING ME...?

WEYMANN WAS NOT NORMALLY RUTHLESS OR ARROGANT. BUT THE FRUSTRATION OF FLYING A CLUMSY TRANSPORT CRAFT HAD EMBITTERED HIM.

YOU MISERABLE - LITTLE TRAITOR! NO DOUBT THE GESTAPO HAD GOOD REASONS FOR BEING ON YOUR TRAIL. NOW YOU WANT ME TO VIOLATE MY COUNTRY'S BORDERS - BREAK HER LAWS - JUST TO SNATCH MORE CRIMINALS FROM JUSTICE.

MISTER WEYMANN - PLEASE, PLEASE KEEP YOUR VOICE DOWN.

BUT WEYMANN'S VOICE HAD CARRIED - AND A TALL LEAN ENGLISHMAN IN A LEATHER FLYING JACKET APPROACHED THEM . . .

YES, MISTER WEYMANN, KEEP YOUR VOICE DOWN. IF YOU WEREN'T SO PUNCH-DRUNK FROM TRUNDLING AROUND IN THAT UGLY GREAT JUNKERS OUT THERE, YOU'D REALISE THAT IT'S THE GESTAPO WHO ARE THE CRIMINALS. DON'T YOU KNOW ANYTHING OF WHAT'S GOING ON IN YOUR PRECIOUS THIRD REICH?

STAY OUT OF THIS, ENGLISHMAN!

THE ENGLISHMAN WAS NOT TO BE SILENCED . . .

LOOK, FRIEND, I'LL PILOT YOUR PLANE FOR YOU. I KNOW AUSTRIA PRETTY WELL AND I'D DO ANYTHING TO SOCK THE GESTAPO IN THE EYE. AS FOR WEYMAN HERE, HE CAN CRAWL BACK INTO HIS HOLE !

SIR, IF YOU WOULD -

I WON'T STAY HERE AND BE INSULTED !



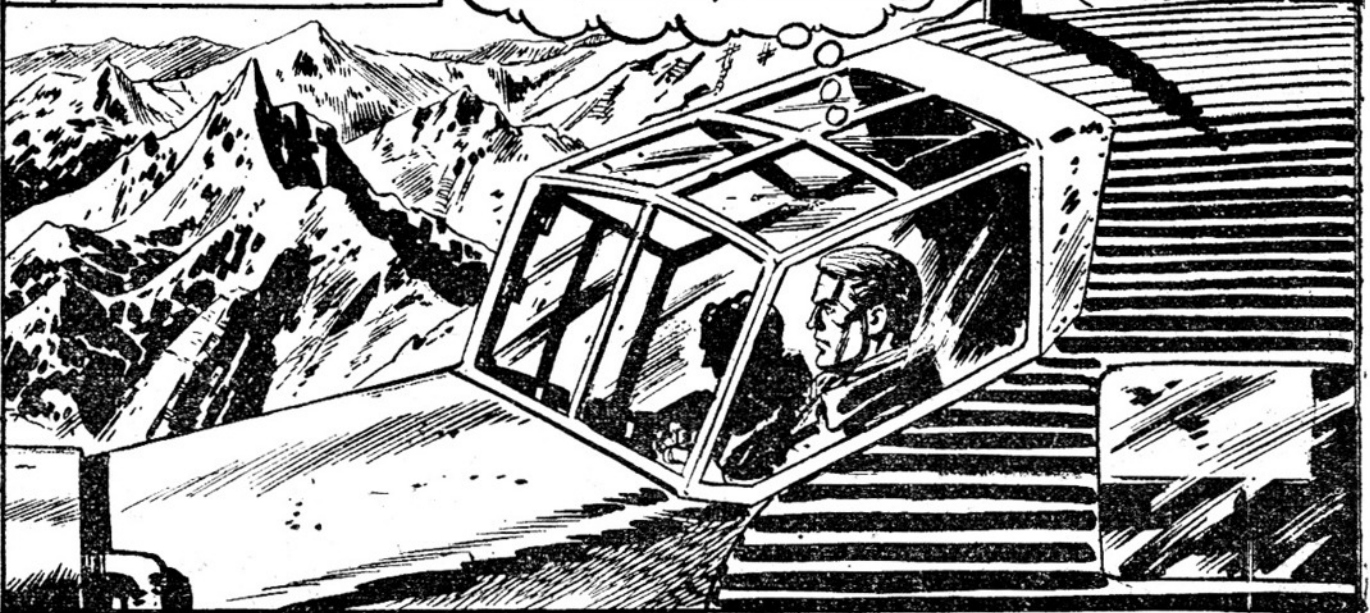
AS WEYMAN WALKED AWAY, SHAKING WITH FURY . . .

NO, JERRY - YOU STICK AROUND WHEN YOU THINK YOU CAN GIVE THE INSULTS WITHOUT TAKING THEM. GET YOURSELF PROMOTED INTO THE LUFTWAFFE - THEY'LL BE NEEDING YOU SOON . . .



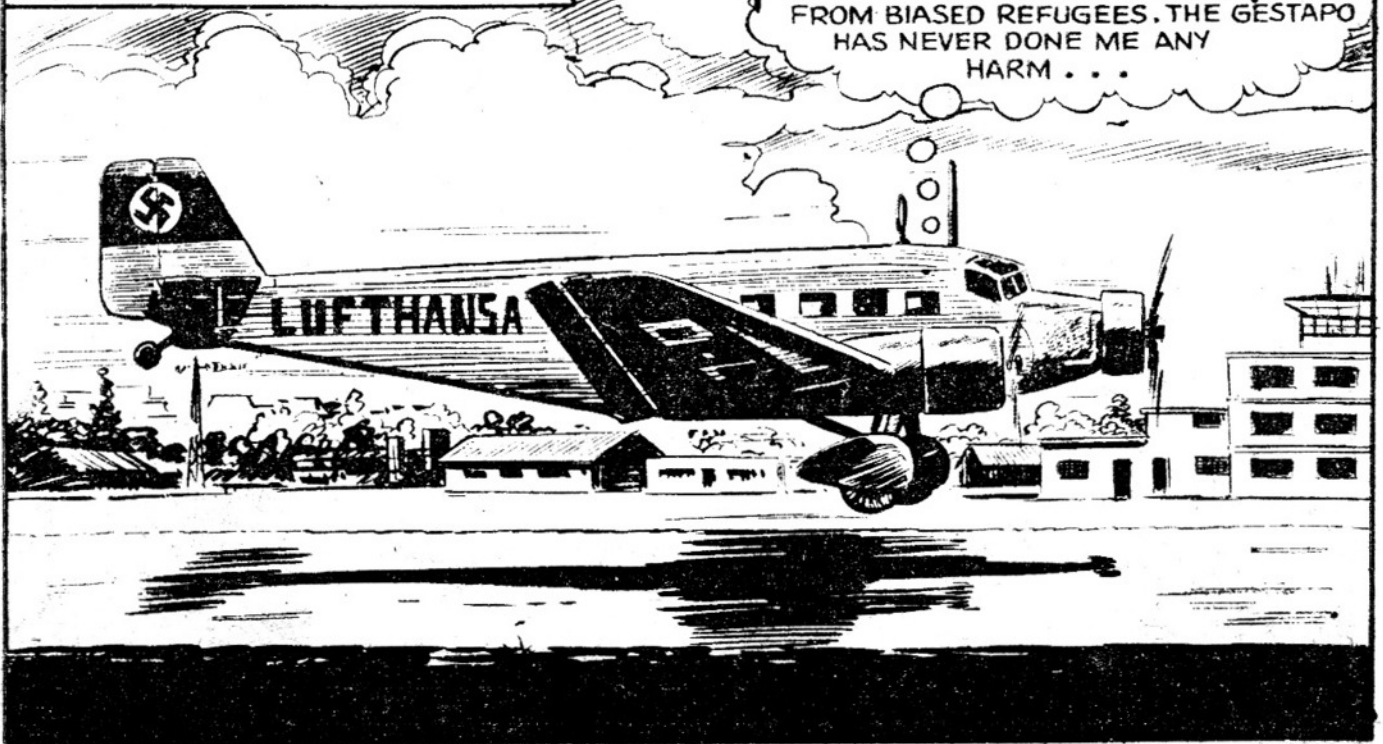
FOR THE NEXT TWO DAYS WEYMAN WAS IN A COLD RAGE. HE AVOIDED THE AIRPORT LOUNGE, AND SPENT HIS TIME HARASSING THE GROUND CREW UNTIL HIS CARGO ARRIVED.

... I KNOW I WAS IN A FOUL MOOD - BUT HOW COULD THAT REFUGEE EXPECT ANY GERMAN PILOT TO DO HIS DIRTY WORK FOR HIM? WOULD THE ENGLISHMAN HAVE FERRIED CRIMINALS OUT OF ENGLAND, I WONDER?



WEYMAN WAS STILL BROODING OVER HIS THOUGHTS AS HE BROUGHT THE CLUMSY, LADEN JUNKERS EXPERTLY INTO TEMPLEHOF AIRPORT, IN BERLIN.

I'VE HEARD A LOT ABOUT THE GESTAPO FROM FOREIGN PILOTS IN SWITZERLAND - AND DON'T BELIEVE HALF OF IT. THEY USUALLY GET THEIR INFORMATION FROM BIASED REFUGEES. THE GESTAPO HAS NEVER DONE ME ANY HARM...



AT TEMPLEHOF, WEYMAN FOUND EVERYONE AGOG WITH STARTLING NEWS. THAT MORNING, THE WEHRMACHT HAD INVADDED POLAND, AND THE ALLIES HAD DELIVERED AN ULTIMATUM. WEYMAN'S PULSE POUNDED - NOW HE WAS BOUND TO BE CALLED UP FOR LUFTWAFFE SERVICE. AS HE WAS LEAVING THE TRANSIT OFFICE A CLERK CALLED HIM OVER...

HERR WEYMAN! YOUR MOTHER HAS PHONED THE OFFICE SEVERAL TIMES. SHE SAYS SHE MUST SEE YOU - URGENTLY.

I WONDER WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT?



TAKING A TAXI FROM THE AIRPORT, WEYMANN WAS HOME IN TEN MINUTES...

RUDOLPH — THANK HEAVEN YOU'VE ARRIVED! THE GESTAPO — THEY HAVE TAKEN YOUR FATHER AND BROTHER. THEY CAME YESTERDAY...

THEY... WHAT?



WEYMANN'S FATHER WAS A PROMINENT BERLIN BUSINESS MAN, AND ALTHOUGH HE WAS NOT A NAZI HIMSELF, HE HAD DONE NOTHING TO ANTAGONISE THE PARTY AT ANY STAGE OF HIS CAREER. WEYMANN'S YOUNGER BROTHER GUNTHER WAS A STUDENT OF TWENTY...

IT WAS AT DAWN — WE WERE IN BED — THEY BROKE DOWN THE DOOR, AND SEIZED YOUR FATHER. GUNTHER TRIED TO FIGHT THEM OFF. THEY BEAT HIM, AND TOOK HIM AWAY. ALSO...

BUT... BUT WHAT HAD THEY DONE?



WEYMANN STOOD, STUNNED, THEN WITH GRIM SET FACE, TURNED TOWARDS THE DOOR...

WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

GESTAPO HEADQUARTERS!

YOU MUST NOT — IT IS OF NO USE — THEY WILL TAKE YOU, AS WELL...



BUT WEYMANN WAS DEAF TO HIS MOTHER'S ENTREATIES. NEITHER HE NOR HIS FAMILY HAD DONE ANY WRONG — THEREFORE THEY WOULD HAVE TO LISTEN TO HIM. IT WAS IN THIS FRAME OF MIND THAT HE CONFRONTED THE GESTAPO . . .

MY NAME IS WEYMANN. YOU ARE HOLDING MY FATHER AND BROTHER—I WANT TO SEE THEM!

YOU ARE OUT OF DATE, WEYMANN. WE WERE HOLDING THEM. THEY WERE SHOT THIS MORNING!



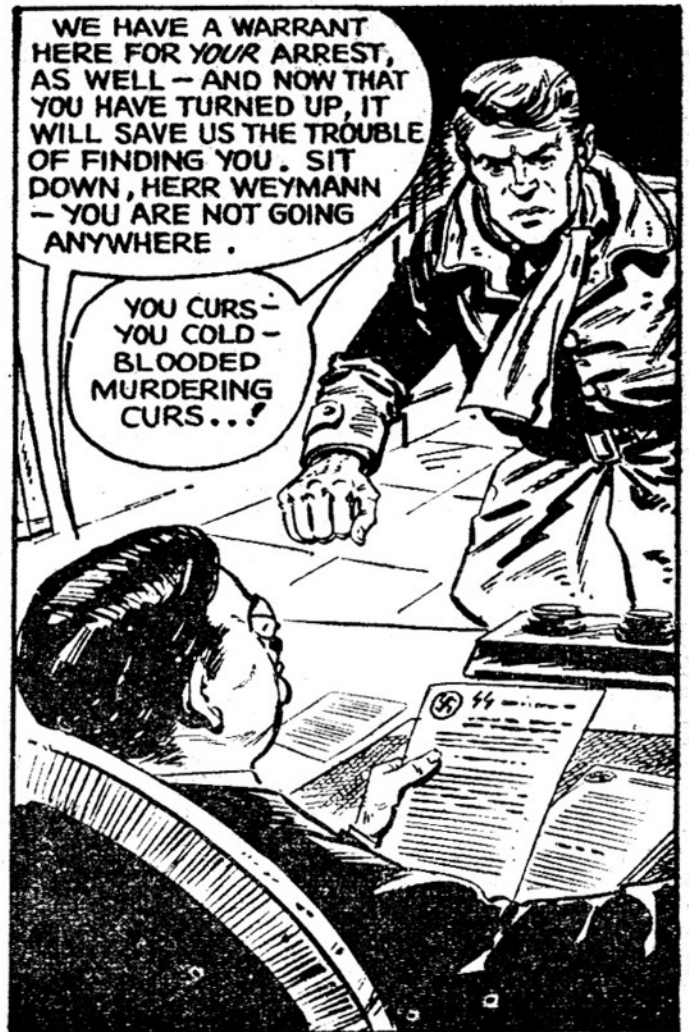
SHOT... MY FATHER AND BROTHER SHOT!

THAT IS WHAT I SAID. THEY WERE DENOUNCED BY A BUSINESS FRIEND OF YOUR FATHER'S. WE HAD GOOD REASON TO BELIEVE THEY WERE PLOTTING AGAINST THE REGIME; I PRESUME YOU ARE RUDOLPH WEYMANN...



WE HAVE A WARRANT HERE FOR YOUR ARREST, AS WELL — AND NOW THAT YOU HAVE TURNED UP, IT WILL SAVE US THE TROUBLE OF FINDING YOU. SIT DOWN, HERR WEYMANN — YOU ARE NOT GOING ANYWHERE.

YOU CURS — YOU COLD-BLOODED MURDERING CURS...!





BUT WEYMANN'S UNINJURED RIGHT ARM FASTENED ON THE BACK OF A CHAIR . . . AND WITH DESPERATE FORCE HE HURLED IT AT THE MIDRIFF OF THE ONCOMING GUARD . . .



THEN WEYMANN BURST FROM THE HEADQUARTERS, AND RAN FRANTICALLY ALONG THE STREET, CLUTCHING HIS WOUNDED ARM . . .



FOR WEYMANN THE NEXT HOUR WAS A NIGHTMARE. DIZZY WITH PAIN, HE STAGGERED FROM ALLEY TO ALLEY, FRANTICALLY RACKING HIS MIND FOR SOMEWHERE TO GO. THEN HE REMEMBERED THAT AN OLD SCHOOL FRIEND, HANS OLENDORFF, HAD TAKEN A FLAT IN THE AREA WHILE STUDYING MEDICINE AT THE UNIVERSITY . . .



OLENDORFF WAS A HOUSE SURGEON IN A SMALL CITY HOSPITAL—AND AS WEYMANN GASPED OUT HIS STORY, OLENDORFF BEGAN TO DRESS HIS WOUND...

I'VE NO ANAESTHETICS — THIS IS GOING TO HURT!

I DON'T CARE — GET THE BULLET OUT...



WHEN THE ORDEAL WAS OVER, WEYMANN SLEPT. HE WOKE JUST BEFORE DUSK AT THE SOUND OF OLENDORFF COMING BACK INTO THE FLAT.

THERE WERE BLOODSTAINS LEADING TO THE DOOR! I SCRUBBED THEM AWAY, AS FAR ALONG THE ALLEY AS I DARED — BUT THERE'S STILL SOME BEYOND THAT, AND THEY'LL LEAD TO THIS AREA! THE GESTAPO WILL SEARCH EVERY HOUSE...

YOU'VE SAVED MY LIFE AND THE BEST WAY I CAN REPAY YOU IS TO GET OUT OF HERE.



IT WAS NEAR TO MIDNIGHT WHEN WEYMANN SLIPPED AWAY FROM OLENDORFF'S FLAT. EYES WARY FOR SIGNS OF PATROLLING GESTAPO, HE HAILED A TAXI AND DROVE TO TEMPLEHOF AIRPORT...

THIS IS THE ONLY WAY I'LL GET OUT OF THE COUNTRY—BUT IT'S DEVILISH RISKY! THE GESTAPO KNOW I'M A PILOT—THEY'RE BOUND TO BE WATCHING THE AIRPORT. WAIT! I KNOW THAT FACE...



WEYMANN HAD SEEN A MAN HE HAD ONCE MET IN SWITZERLAND—AN AMERICAN CALLED ARKWRIGHT, WHO FLEW HIS OWN PRIVATE PLANE...

SAY, I REMEMBER YOU! YOU'RE...



DON'T MENTION MY NAME! LISTEN, ARKWRIGHT—THE GESTAPO ARE AFTER ME AND I MUST GET OUT OF GERMANY! IF I CAN'T MANAGE IT TONIGHT, I'M FINISHED. CAN YOU HELP ME?

SUCH WAS THE COURAGE AND SPIRIT OF THE AMERICAN THAT HE ASKED FOR NO FURTHER EXPLANATION. IN A FEW MOMENTS THEY WERE STEALING ACROSS THE AIRFIELD ITSELF...

OKAY - NOW LET'S MAKE FOR MY CRATE NICE AND EASY! WE'LL TAKE OFF WITHOUT BENEFIT OF CONTROL - AND IF ANYTHING IS COMING IN TO LAND, THAT'S JUST TOO BAD...



THANKS, ARKWRIGHT! I'M MAKING YOU TAKE AN APPALLING RISK! THEY'D SHOOT BOTH OF US...!

BOTH MEN'S HEARTS WERE POUNDING AS THEY CROSSED THE EXPOSED AIRFIELD TO THE AMERICAN'S LITTLE TWO-SEATER CABIN PLANE...

WELL, WE MADE IT SO FAR...

I NEVER THOUGHT I COULD BE SO SCARED!



THE AMERICAN CLAMBERED INTO THE CABIN, AND TOOK THE STICK. WARY EYES PEERING AHEAD INTO THE DARKNESS, HE OPENED THE THROTTLE WIDE...

CAN'T SEE ANY OTHER LANDING LIGHTS - SO HERE GOES!



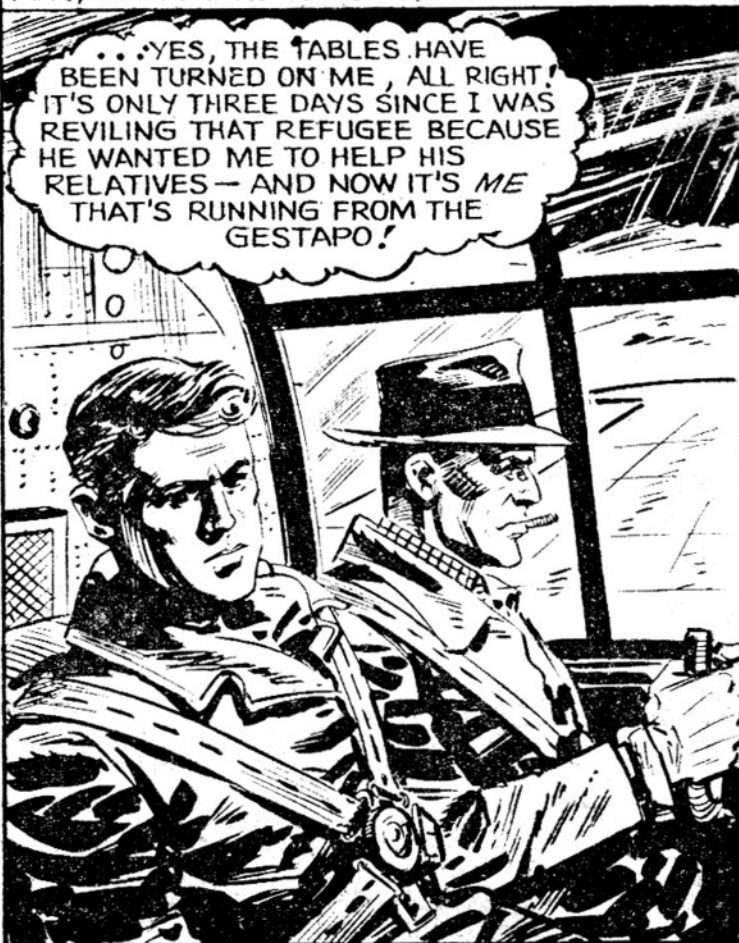
The Crowded Sky

THE PLANE WAS AIRBORNE IN FIFTY YARDS. BANKING AWAY FROM THE CONTROL BUILDINGS, THEY CLIMBED INTO THE NIGHT...



MY TANKS ARE FULL—SO WE OUGHT TO MAKE SWITZERLAND.

AND SO WEYMAN LEFT BERLIN FOR EVER—A LUCKY MAN, FORTUNATE IN HIS FRIENDS...



...YES, THE TABLES HAVE BEEN TURNED ON ME, ALL RIGHT! IT'S ONLY THREE DAYS SINCE I WAS REVILING THAT REFUGEE BECAUSE HE WANTED ME TO HELP HIS RELATIVES—AND NOW IT'S ME THAT'S RUNNING FROM THE GESTAPO!

FOR THE NEXT THREE HOURS THEY SPED SOUTHWARDS. THEN ARKWRIGHT PUT THE STICK FORWARD, AND THEY DROPPED STEEPLY DOWN THROUGH THE CLOUD LAYER...



BAD WEATHER!

YES—BUT WE'VE GOT TO ROUGH IT! WE'RE NEAR THE MOUNTAINS, AND WITH A FULL LOAD I CAN'T GO OVER THEM! WE MUST FIND A PASS THAT WILL TAKE US THROUGH!

BUFFETED BY WIND AND RAIN, THE TINY MACHINE PITCHED VIOLENTLY UNDER ARKWRIGHT'S RESTRAINING HANDS .

DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOU'RE GOING?

I THINK I DO - IF MY BEARINGS ARE RIGHT, WE OUGHT TO BE IN LINE WITH A GOOD PASS THAT WILL TAKE US THROUGH WITH ROOM TO SPARE! BUT IF WE'VE BEEN DRIFTING . . .

...AND THEN SUDDENLY, DEAD AHEAD, WEYMANN SAW GIGANTIC, REARING MASSES OF CLOUD-WREATHED ROCK . . .

MOUNTAIN!

WE CAN'T CLIMB - WE'VE GOT TO GO ROUND . . .



The Crowded Sky

WORKING STICK AND RUDDER FORCIBLY, THE AMERICAN THREW THE MACHINE INTO A STEEP BANKING TURN.

HARDER TO PORT...
HARDER!
THERE'S MOUNTAIN EVERYWHERE!

CAN'T DO IT! SHE'S TURNING FULL CIRCLE NOW!



WITHOUT WARNING, THE PLANE HIT THE ROCK-FACE AND SPUN ROUND. THEN THEY WERE SKIDDING HELPLESSLY FROM IMPACT TO IMPACT...

WE'VE STRUCK...

SWITCH OFF, ARKWRIGHT—
SWITCH OFF!

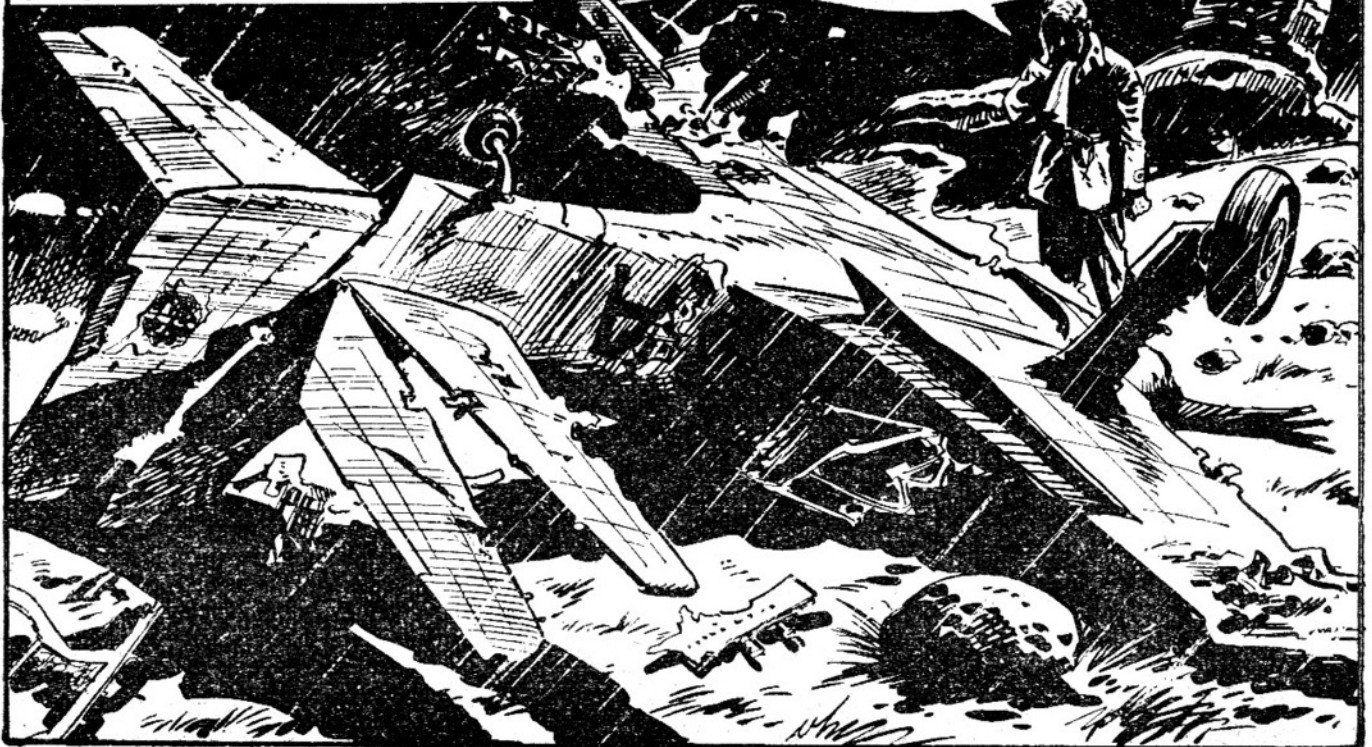


WEYMANN REMEMBERED NOTHING MORE ... UNTIL HE CAME TO HIS SENSES, TO FIND HIMSELF HANGING UPSIDE DOWN IN HIS STRAPS IN A DARK SILENCE, THE STENCH OF PETROL AND BURNT OIL IN HIS NOSTRILS ...

MY ARM ... IT HURTS LIKE THE DEVIL! GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE!

PAINFULLY AND WITH GREAT DIFFICULTY, WEYMANN UNDID THE TAUT STRAPS, AND TUMBLED FORWARD, KICKING HIS WAY OUT THROUGH THE TORN SIDE-PANELS.

WHAT A MESS! GOOD THING THAT ARKWRIGHT SWITCHED OFF THE IGNITION OR WE'D BE BURNING — ARKWRIGHT! — HE'S STILL IN THERE...!



BUT ARKWRIGHT'S SIDE OF THE CABIN HAD TAKEN THE FULL FORCE OF THE IMPACT . . .



ARKWRIGHT!
HE'S . . .

THE AMERICAN WOULD NEVER FLY AGAIN. WITH INFINITE CARE, WEYMANN EASED THE BODY OUT OF THE WRECKAGE, AND ON TO THE RAIN-SOAKED GRASS. THEN HE REACHED INTO ARKWRIGHT'S JACKET - AND TOOK OUT A WALLET AND PASSPORT . . .



BY RIGHTS, IT SHOULD BE ME WHO IS LYING THERE, ARKWRIGHT! I'VE GOT NOTHING LEFT TO LOSE EXCEPT MY LIFE! YET IT HASN'T WORKED OUT THAT WAY! SO I'M TAKING YOUR PAPERS AND MONEY - YOU WON'T NEED THEM ANY MORE, AND THEY'LL MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE TO ME!

TWO HOURS LATER, WEYMANN STAGGERED INTO A LITTLE HAMLET FAR DOWN THE MOUNTAINSIDE . . . HE WAS IN SWITZERLAND .



I'M AN AMERICAN - MY NAME IS ARKWRIGHT! I'VE BEEN IN A PLANE CRASH - MY CO-PILOT HAS LOST HIS LIFE . . .

Chapter 2 FIRST CREW

IT WAS AS JOE ARKWRIGHT, THAT WEYMANN FINALLY REACHED ENGLAND. HE CARRIED IN HIS HEART A BURNING HATRED OF EVERYTHING NAZI.

SORRY, SIR, GOT TO CHECK YOUR BAG! CUSTOMS FORMALITIES, YOU KNOW - AND NOW THAT THERE'S A WAR ON, THINGS ARE RATHER STRICT!

SO THIS IS ENGLAND, WHERE EVEN THE OFFICIALS ARE POLITE! IN NAZI GERMANY, THIS MAN WOULD BE SUSPICIOUS AND THREATENING!



THE URGE TO FLY WAS DEEP IN THE MARROW OF WEYMANN'S BONES, AND THERE WAS ONLY ONE WAY HE COULD FLY IN WARTIME BRITAIN. HE HAD A FIERCE DESIRE TO STRIKE BACK AT THE VILE REGIME WHICH HAD OUTLAWED HIM. AND ONE DAY, AFTER SIX MONTHS IN LONDON, HE WENT TO THE AIR MINISTRY...

MY NAME IS ARKWRIGHT, AND I'M AN AMERICAN. EXCUSE THE ACCENT, BUT MY MOTHER WAS SWISS, AND I SPENT QUITE A LOT OF MY LIFE IN BERNE! YOU NEED PILOTS URGENTLY - WELL, I'M A TRAINED COMMERCIAL PILOT, AND I'D LIKE TO VOLUNTEER!

I SEE, YOU'LL HAVE TO GO THROUGH CERTAIN FORMALITIES, OF COURSE...



The Crowded Sky

THE WHEELS TURNED SWIFTLY. THREE DAYS LATER, 'ARKWRIGHT' WAS BEING INTERVIEWED BY AN INTELLIGENCE OFFICER...

ARKWRIGHT, WE'VE BEEN CHECKING UP ON YOU IN BERNE! ACCORDING TO OUR INFORMATION, YOU CRASHED A PRIVATE AIRCRAFT SIX MONTHS AGO IN THE ALPS! THAT SAME DAY, *BERLIN*, OF ALL PLACES, COMPLAINED THAT A SWISS-REGISTERED LIGHT AIRCRAFT HAD VIOLATED TAKE-OFF PROCEDURES AT TEMPLEHOF! NOW WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THAT?



ARKWRIGHT'S MOUTH WENT DRY— BUT HE FACED UP TO THE INTELLIGENCE OFFICER WITH A TENSE SMILE...

I'D RATHER NOT TALK ABOUT IT...



WELL, I'LL TALK ABOUT IT, ARKWRIGHT! OUR SOURCES REPORT THAT YOU FERRIED A HUNTED GERMAN OUT FROM UNDER THE NOSES OF THE GESTAPO. A MAN CALLED WEYMANN, WHO WAS, UNFORTUNATELY, KILLED IN THE CRASH!

TO HIS UTTER ASTONISHMENT, THE GERMAN FOUND HIMSELF SHAKEN BY THE HAND...

WE NEED MEN LIKE YOU, ARKWRIGHT— TOUGH, DARING, AND COURAGEOUS— AND WE'RE PREPARED TO CUT A LOT OF RED TAPE TO GET THEM! SO IF YOU WANT TO FLY IN THE R.A.F. WE CAN ARRANGE IT!

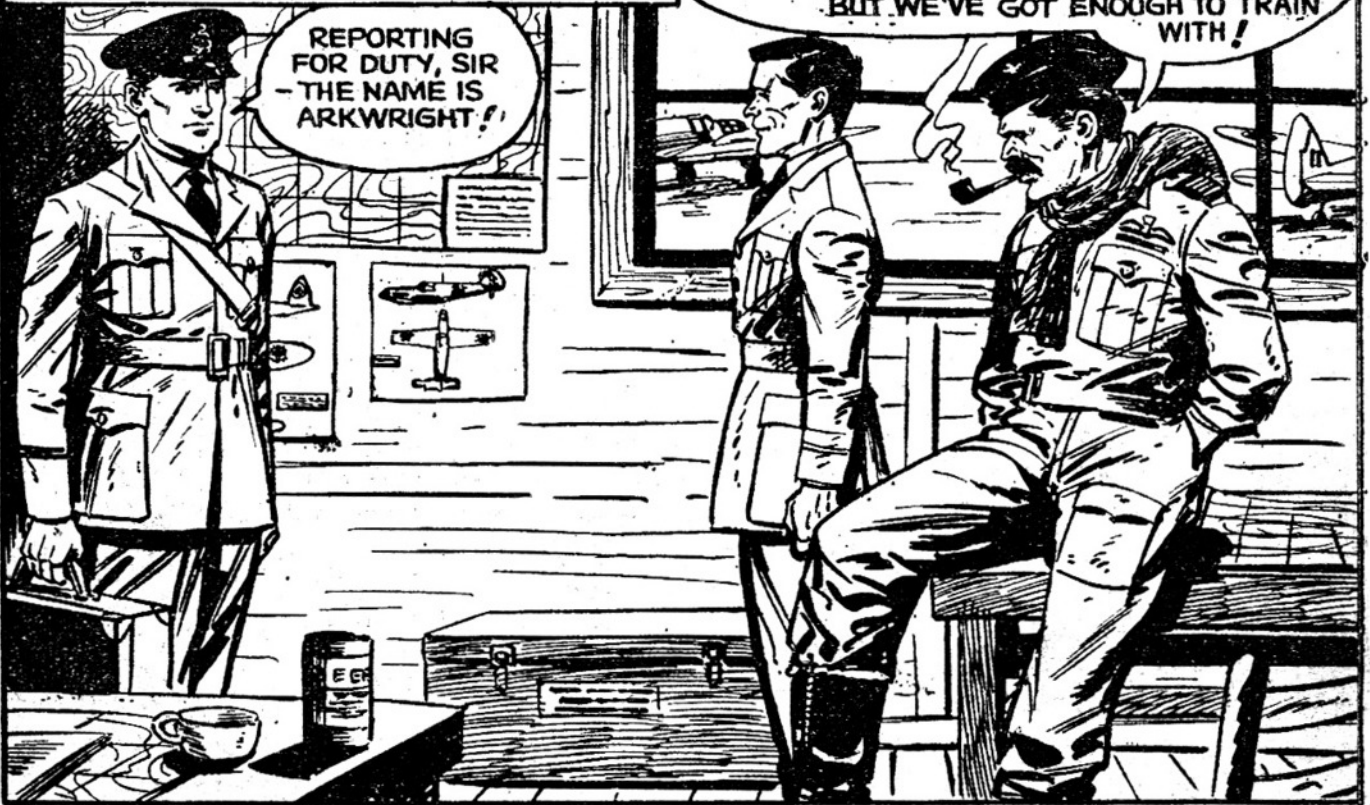
TH—THANK YOU!...



WITHIN THREE WEEKS, ARKWRIGHT WAS GRANTED A COMMISSION IN THE ROYAL AIR FORCE AND POSTED TO A NEWLY-FORMED BLENHEIM SQUADRON IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE ...

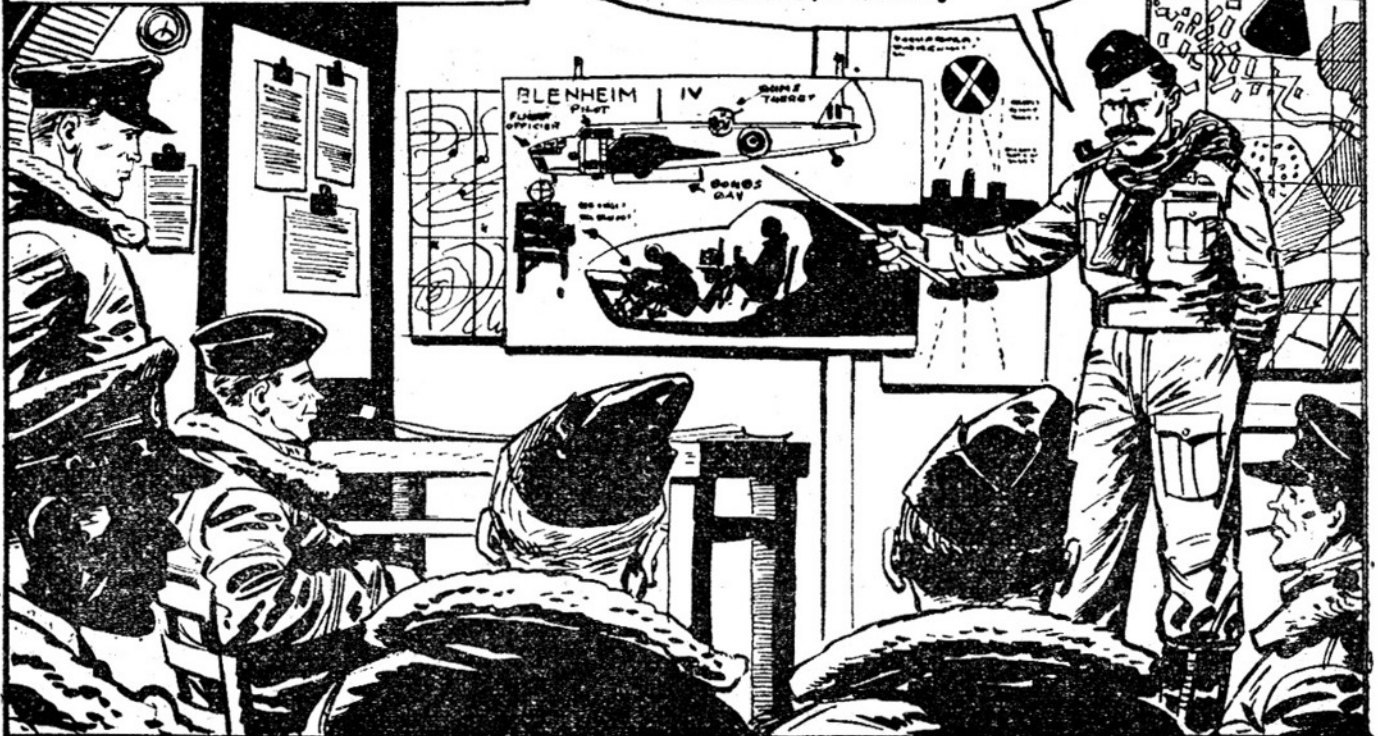
AH, YES—YOU'RE THE AMERICAN WE HAD A MEMO ABOUT FROM THE AIR MINISTRY! THINGS ARE A BIT HAYWIRE HERE AT THE MOMENT. AIRCRAFT ARE IN DARNED SHORT SUPPLY, BUT WE'VE GOT ENOUGH TO TRAIN WITH!

REPORTING FOR DUTY, SIR—THE NAME IS ARKWRIGHT!



PILOT OFFICER ARKWRIGHT SOON FOUND THAT MOST OF THE NEW PILOTS WERE MEN WHO, LIKE HIMSELF, HAD HELD CIVIL LICENCES AND HAD FLOWN TWIN-ENGINE AIRCRAFT ...

AS YOU KNOW, GENTLEMEN, WE'RE TAKING ALL THE SHORT-CUTS! EVERY MAN IN THE ROOM HAS PASSED A FORMAL TEST ON TRAINERS AND NOW WE'RE GOING STRAIGHT ON TO BOMBERS! NOW, HERE IS THE BLENHEIM FOUR!



The Crowded Sky

ARKWRIGHT WON HIS WINGS AS A BLENHEIM PILOT AFTER LESS FLYING HOURS THAN ANY OTHER MAN ON THE SQUADRON. HE WAS PROMOTED TO FLYING OFFICER, AND GIVEN HIS OWN CREW...



WELL, ARKWRIGHT, THESE ARE THE MEN YOU'LL SKIPPER TO DEATH OR GLORY! STOWELL, HERE, IS YOUR NAVIGATOR-BOMB-AIMER, AND THOMAS YOUR GUNNER! JOHNNIE STOWELL HAS A BROTHER WHO WAS AN OPPO OF MINE ON HAWKER HARTS JUST BEFORE HOSTILITIES - SO IF YOU PRANG WITH HIM ABOARD, I'LL NEVER LIVE IT DOWN!

PLEASED TO MEET YOU, SIR!

LATER, IN THE AIRCREW MESS, ARKWRIGHT TURNED TO JOHNNIE STOWELL...

WELL, JOHNNIE, SO THE C.O. IS A PAL OF YOUR BROTHER! WITH THOSE CONNECTIONS, YOU SHOULD'VE PUT IN FOR PILOT DUTIES...

LOOK, ARKWRIGHT, LET'S CUT THE PERSONAL STUFF RIGHT NOW. I DON'T LIKE AMERICANS - AND THE BARE FLYING ROUTINE IS AS FAR AS I GO WITH YOU - NO FURTHER!



STOWELL WALKED INSOLENTLY AWAY, LEAVING ARKWRIGHT STARING AFTER HIM WITH NARROWED EYES. IT WAS ANOTHER PILOT NEARBY WHO SUPPLIED THE ANSWERS...

NOW WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH HIM?

YOU BOOBED THERE, ARKWRIGHT! STOWELL'S BEEN MAD ABOUT FLYING SINCE HE WAS A KID, BUT HE FAILED ON FIGHTERS — THEN HE FAILED ON BOMBERS! WHAT RUBS IT IN IS THAT HIS ELDER BROTHER IS A BIG SUCCESS ON HURRICANES...!



IN THE WEEKS OF AIRCREW TRAINING THAT FOLLOWED, ARKWRIGHT WAS TO FIND THAT LACK OF TEAM-SPIRIT IN A SMALL BOMBER LIKE A BLENHEIM COULD BE A DANGEROUS LIABILITY...

THIS IS OUR FIFTH ROUTE FLIGHT, NAVIGATOR, SO IT WON'T BE LONG BEFORE WE'RE READY FOR OPS! WE'RE ON OUR OWN THIS TIME — SO LET'S MAKE IT A GOOD ONE!



YOU GIVE THE ORDERS — I'LL GIVE THE COURSE!

THE TARGET AREA WAS A DESOLATE STRETCH OF CORNWALL, FITTED OUT AS A BOMBING RANGE WITH GREAT YELLOW MARKERS. DURING THE MONOTONOUS FLIGHT SOUTHWARD, THE USUAL AIRCREW SMALLTALK WAS ABSENT. AS THEY CAME IN FOR THEIR BOMBING RUN, TENSION WAS HIGH ...

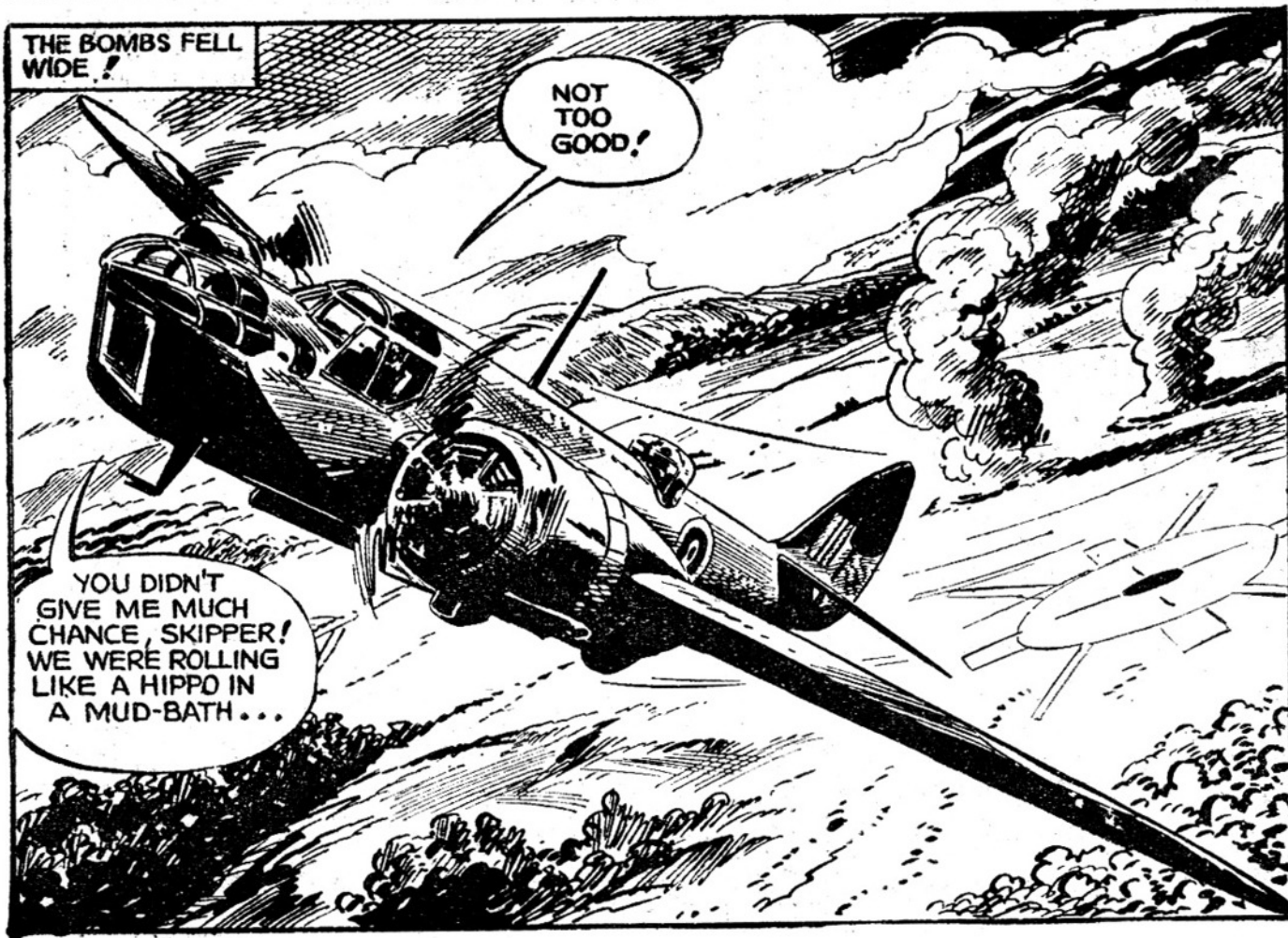
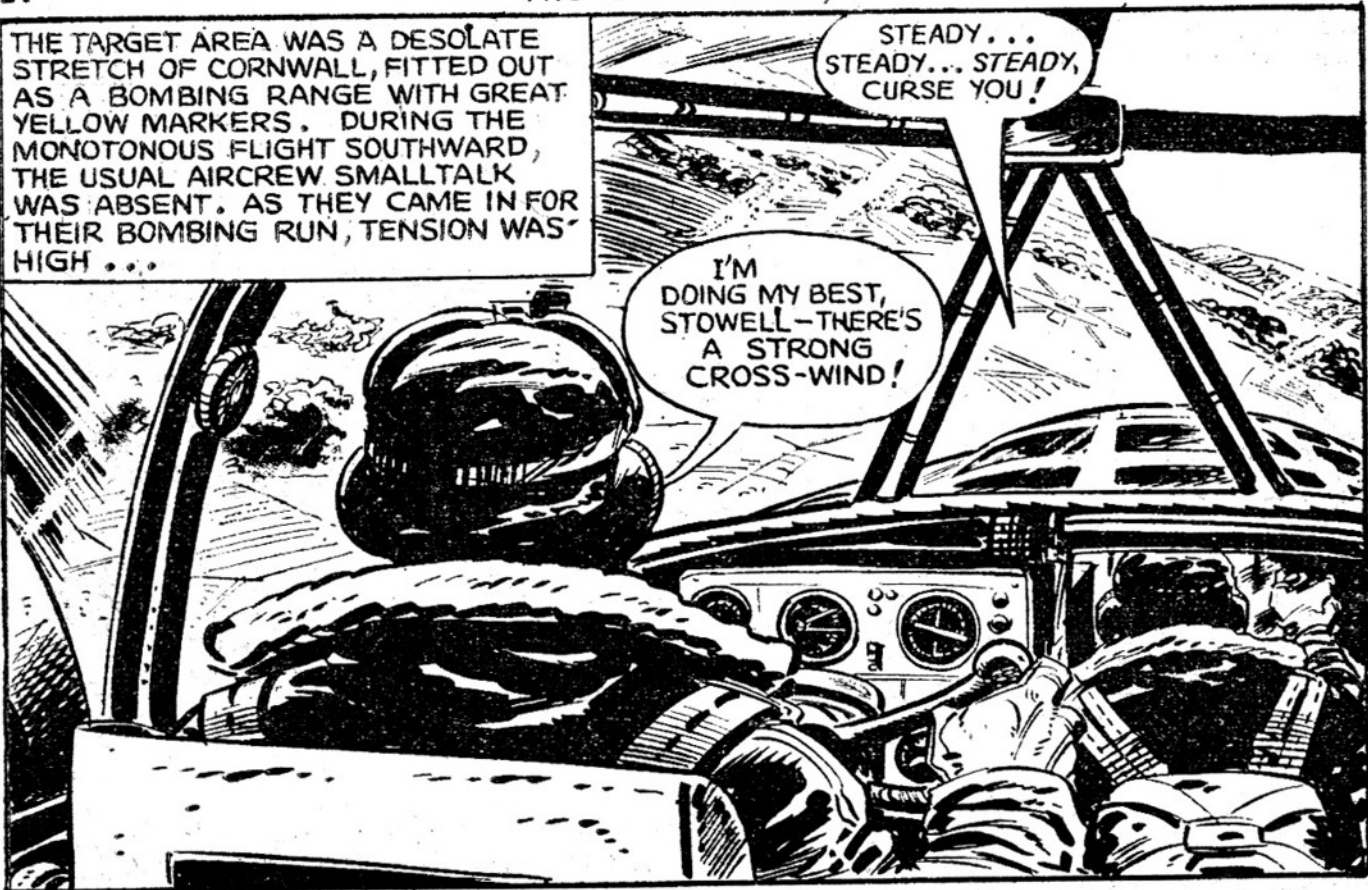
STEADY...
STEADY... STEADY,
CURSE YOU!

I'M
DOING MY BEST,
STOWELL—THERE'S
A STRONG
CROSS-WIND!

THE BOMBS FELL
WIDE!

NOT
TOO
GOOD!

YOU DIDN'T
GIVE ME MUCH
CHANCE, SKIPPER!
WE WERE ROLLING
LIKE A HIPPO IN
A MUD-BATH...





BUT HAD JOHNNIE STOWELL CHECKED UP, HE WOULD HAVE FOUND THAT THE CROSS-WIND HAD FRESHENED CONSIDERABLY—AND THE BLENHEIM WAS DRIFTING WELL OFF COURSE TO THE EAST. FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER IT NOSED DOWNWARDS...

I RECKON WE'RE JUST ABOUT THERE—CORRECT ME IF I'M WRONG, NAVIGATOR!

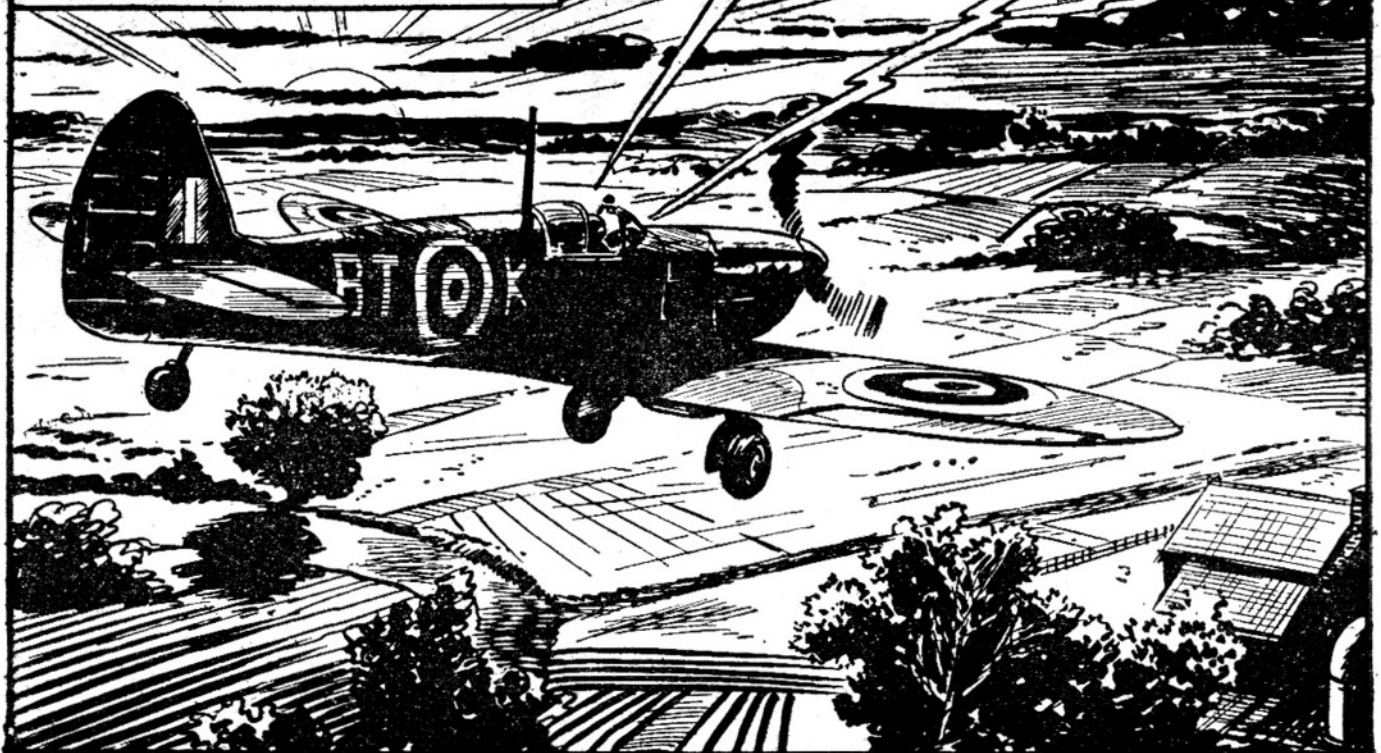
YOU'RE THERE, ALL RIGHT—YOU'RE THERE!



BUT THE LONE BOMBER WAS NOWHERE NEAR BASE—IT WAS ALMOST DIRECTLY ABOVE A SPITFIRE SQUADRON AIRFIELD IN LINCOLNSHIRE, AND WAS DROPPING DOWN STRAIGHT INTO THE PATH OF A FIGHTER LANDING CIRCUIT...

RED APPLE TO CONTROL—CIRCLING BASE AT ANGELS FOUR—MAY I COME IN—MAY I COME IN?

YOU MAY COME IN, RED APPLE.



THE SPITFIRE STREAKED
ROUND IN THE GATHERING
DUSK . . .



IN THE SPLIT-SECOND BEFORE
COLLISION, ARKWRIGHT SAW
THE ONCOMING MACHINE . . .



ARKWRIGHT JAMMED WIDE THE THROTTLE AND HURLED THE BLENHEIM OVER AND UP - BUT WITH A BRIEF, FIENDISH SNARL THE FIGHTER ROCKETED IN UPON THEM...

BALE OUT...
EVERYBODY! BALE
OUT - WE'VE
HAD IT!

... AND SUDDENLY THE BLENHEIM, TAILLESS,
WAS YAWING DRUNKENLY THROUGH THE SKY.

GALVANISED BY URGENCY, ARKWRIGHT PRACTICALLY HURLED HIS DAZED CREW OUT OF THE HATCH - AND WAS THE LAST MAN TO JUMP FROM THE SPINNING WRECK.

THERE'S
JUST GOT TO BE
HEIGHT FOR MY
CHUTE TO OPEN.

THERE WAS ENOUGH
HEIGHT - JUST -

I MADE
IT - SO THE
OTHERS MUST
HAVE!

GRIMLY, ARKWRIGHT WALKED TOWARDS THE PILLAR OF FLAME AND SMOKE ON THE SKYLINE, AND FOUND THAT A DETACHMENT FROM THE NEARBY FIGHTER STATION HAD GOT THERE FIRST.

I'M THE PILOT OF THAT!

THEN THERE'S TROUBLE AHEAD FOR YOU, BOY! YOU WANDERED INTO OUR FIGHTER LANDING CIRCUIT, AND ALMOST PRANGED A SPITFIRE — AND THAT, LADDIE, IS HIGH TREASON! THEY WON'T HANG YOU — BUT THEY'LL KEEP YOU SO CLOSE TO TERRA FIRMA FROM NOW ON THAT YOU'LL SPROUT ROOTS!



IN THE NEXT HOUR, ARKWRIGHT'S NAVIGATOR AND GUNNER WERE PICKED UP BY PATROLS FROM THE FIGHTER STATION — AND AFTER A TOUGH SESSION WITH THE FIGHTER C.O., THE BLENHEIM CREW WERE GIVEN TEMPORARY QUARTERS ...

I'VE SAID NOTHING SO FAR, STOWELL — BUT THERE'LL BE AN ENQUIRY, AND THEN I'LL HAVE TO SPEAK! WE WERE WELL OFF COURSE — YET I STUCK STRICTLY TO YOUR DIRECTIONS!

I KNOW, ARKWRIGHT, I ADMIT IT! I THOUGHT I WAS A CLEVER JOHNNIE, SO I DIDN'T CHECK THE COURSE AT STAINES — I DIDN'T CHECK IT!



The Crowded Sky

TO THE BLENHEIM SQUADRON, THE NEW BOMBERS WERE WORTH THEIR WEIGHT IN GOLD — AND WHEN THE ENQUIRY WAS HELD, NO PUNCHES WERE PULLED...

WE'RE LIKE THE ANCIENT SPARTANS HERE, ARKWRIGHT — YOU EITHER COME BACK WITH YOUR SHIELD, OR ON IT — THE SHIELD IN THIS CASE BEING A VALUABLE BOMBER! SO YOU'D BETTER HAVE A GOOD EXCUSE FOR BEING OVER THAT FIGHTER DROME!



WELL, SIR...

BUT ARKWRIGHT STEPPED FORWARD AND SPOKE DECISIVELY...

AS THE SKIPPER, IT'S MY RIGHT TO SPEAK FIRST, SIR! THE FACTS ARE SIMPLY THESE — I DELIBERATELY DEVIATED FROM COURSE AS A TEST ROUTINE. WE WERE AT TWELVE THOUSAND FEET — WELL OUT OF THE WAY OF ANY FIGHTER CIRCUIT —

THEN HOW THE DEUCE DID YOU COME TO COLLIDE WITH A SPIT AT ANGELS FOUR?



ARKWRIGHT WAS CONCOCTING A 'STORY' AND A PLAUSIBLE STORY AT THAT...

ENGINE TROUBLE, SIR! THE PORT ENGINE PACKED UP UNEXPECTEDLY, AND WE HAD TO GO DOWN! IT WAS AN UNLUCKY SHOW WE HAPPENED TO BE SITTING ON TOP OF A FIGHTER CIRCUIT.

'UNLUCKY SHOW' — IT WAS A DISASTER! STOWELL — WHAT HAVE YOU GOT TO SAY?



THE SKIPPER HAS SAID ALL THERE IS TO SAY, SIR!

... AND THAT WAS THAT! ARKWRIGHT GOT A BLISTERING REPRIMAND - BUT IF THE ACCIDENT HAD BEEN PINNED ON THE NAVIGATOR'S NEGLIGENCE OF DUTY, STOWELL WOULD HAVE BEEN TAKEN OFF AIRCREW FOR EVER. AND NOBODY KNEW THIS BETTER THAN JOHNNIE STOWELL...

IN MY SCHEME OF THINGS THE SKIPPER IS RESPONSIBLE FOR *EVERYTHING* ON HIS AIRCRAFT - EVEN HIS NAVIGATOR!

ARKWRIGHT - I - I'VE BEHAVED BADLY TOWARDS YOU EVER SINCE WE TEAMED UP! YET YOU TOOK THE BLAME IN THERE, AND PULLED ME OUT OF THE HOTTEST SPOT IN MY CAREER!



THERE WAS A SILENCE - AND THEN STOWELL GRINNED, AND IMPULSIVELY HELD OUT HIS HAND...

SKIPPER, YOU'VE JUST GOT YOURSELF A NAVIGATOR WHO *WON'T* MAKE MISTAKES - EVEN IF HE HAS TO CALCULATE HIS COURSES TEN TIMES OVER!

I'LL KEEP YOU TO THAT, JOHNNIE!



Chapter 3.

SELF-BETRAYAL

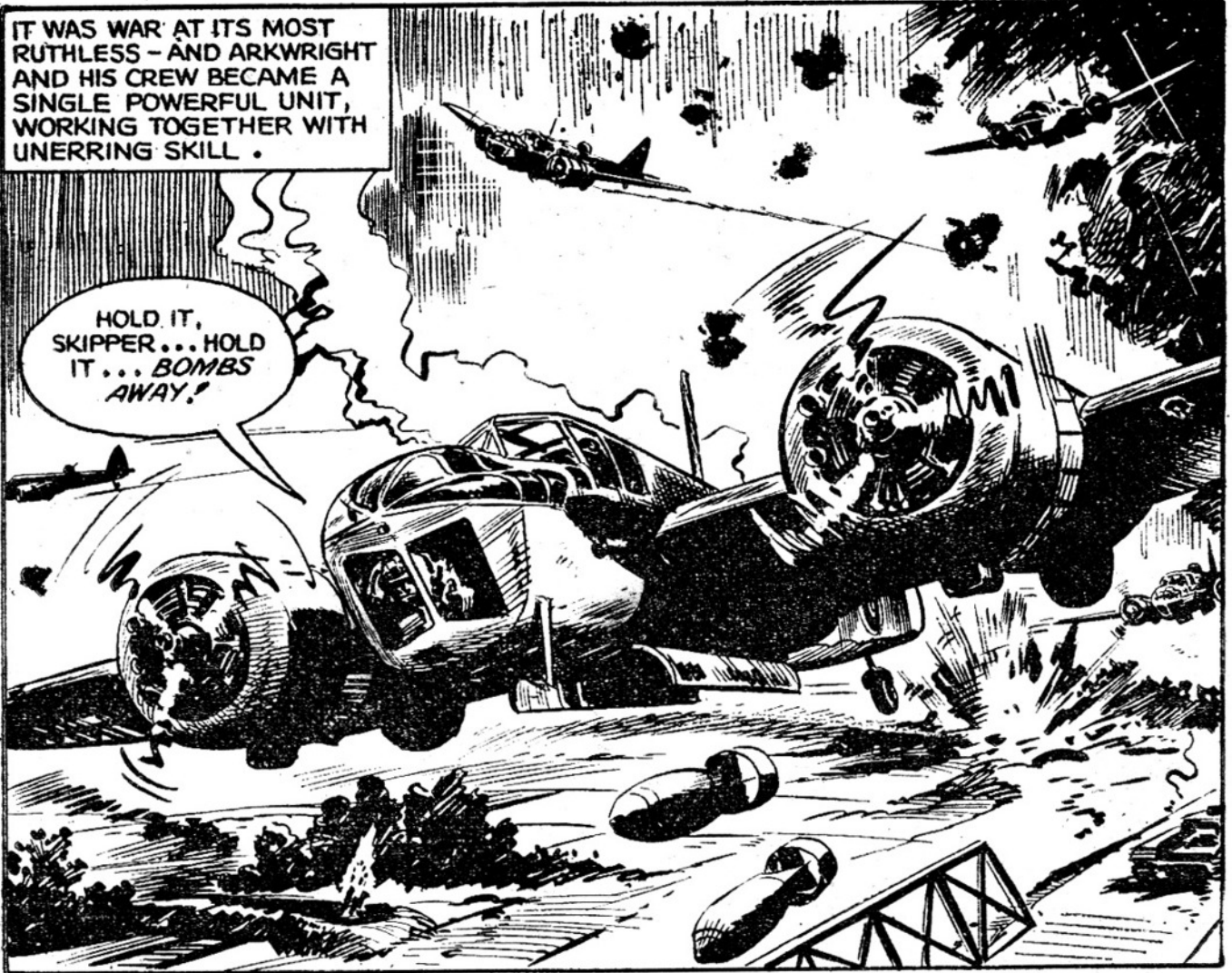
FROM THEN ON, ARKWRIGHT AND HIS NAVIGATOR WERE FIRM FRIENDS AND THEY THREW THEMSELVES WHOLEHEARTEDLY INTO PERFECTING THEIR FLYING AND BOMBING TECHNIQUE. IT WAS NOT UNTIL MAY, 1940, THAT THE WAR BECAME A REAL THING FOR ARKWRIGHT, ALIAS RUDOLPH WEYMANN. THEN HE, AND OTHERS OF HIS SQUADRON, FOUND THEMSELVES RANGING OVER BELGIUM ON PERILOUS DAYLIGHT MISSIONS ...

WE'VE GOT TO BUST THAT BRIDGE, SO LET'S GET IN THERE AND FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE, *DON'T SCATTER!* IF MESSERSCHMITTS JUMP US, WE CAN HANDLE THEM ONLY IF WE STICK IN CLOSE FORMATION!



IT WAS WAR AT ITS MOST RUTHLESS - AND ARKWRIGHT AND HIS CREW BECAME A SINGLE POWERFUL UNIT, WORKING TOGETHER WITH UNERRING SKILL.

HOLD IT, SKIPPER... HOLD IT... BOMBS AWAY!



BUT EVEN THIS KIND OF BOMBING, AT THE DANGEROUS LEVEL OF 500 FEET, WAS TO ARKWRIGHT AN IMPERSONAL THING...

RATHER AN EERIE FEELING, SKIPPER, TO BE SITTING WITHIN A QUARTER OF A MILE OF THE WHOLE GERMAN ARMY!

JUDGING FROM THE STUFF THAT'S HITTING OUR WINGS, THEY'RE ALL SHOOTING AT US AT ONCE!



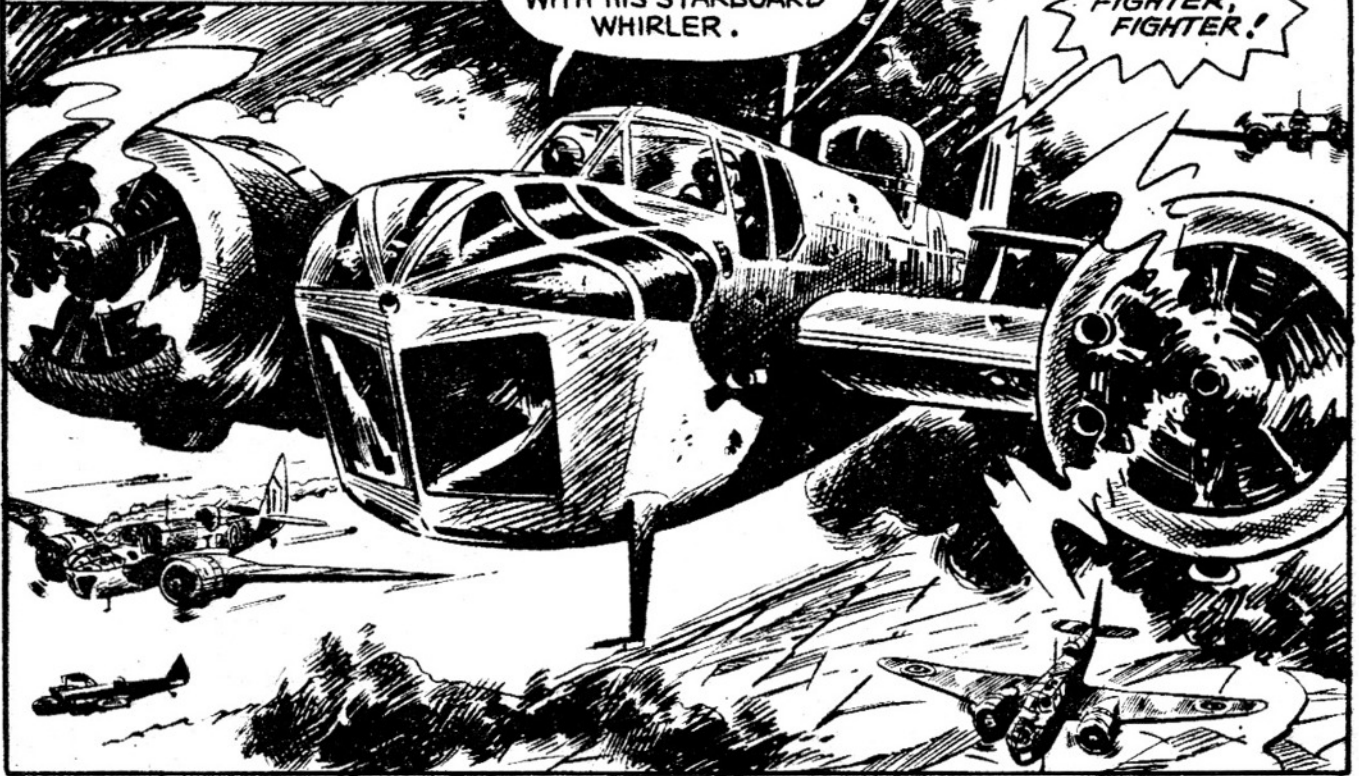
The Crowded Sky

SOON THE AREA OF THE BRIDGE WAS A BILLOWING INFERNO OF FLYING STEEL AND EARTH! THEN THE BLENHEIMS CLIMBED INTO FORMATION AGAIN, AND THUNDERED AWAY TOWARDS THE NORTH...

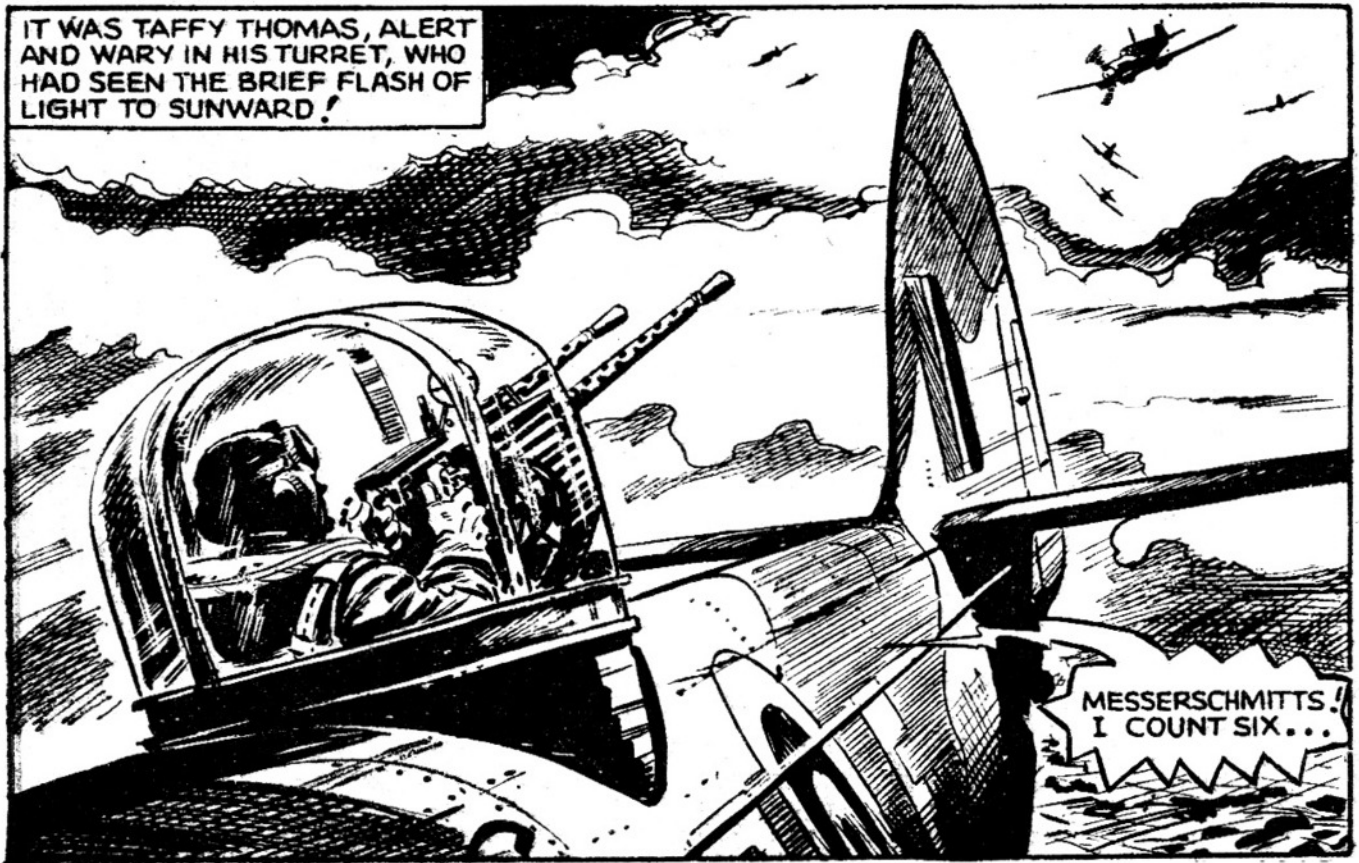
G FOR GEORGE IS LIMPING A BIT - SOMETHING THE MATTER WITH HIS STARBOARD WHIRLER.

EVERYBODY WITH US?

FIGHTER, FIGHTER!



IT WAS TAFFY THOMAS, ALERT AND WARY IN HIS TURRET, WHO HAD SEEN THE BRIEF FLASH OF LIGHT TO SUNWARD!



MESSERSCHMITTS! I COUNT SIX...



BLENHEIMS! IF WE CAN BREAK THEIR FORMATION, THEY'RE HIGHLY VULNERABLE FROM ABOVE... THE TURRETS HAVE ONLY TWO GUNS...

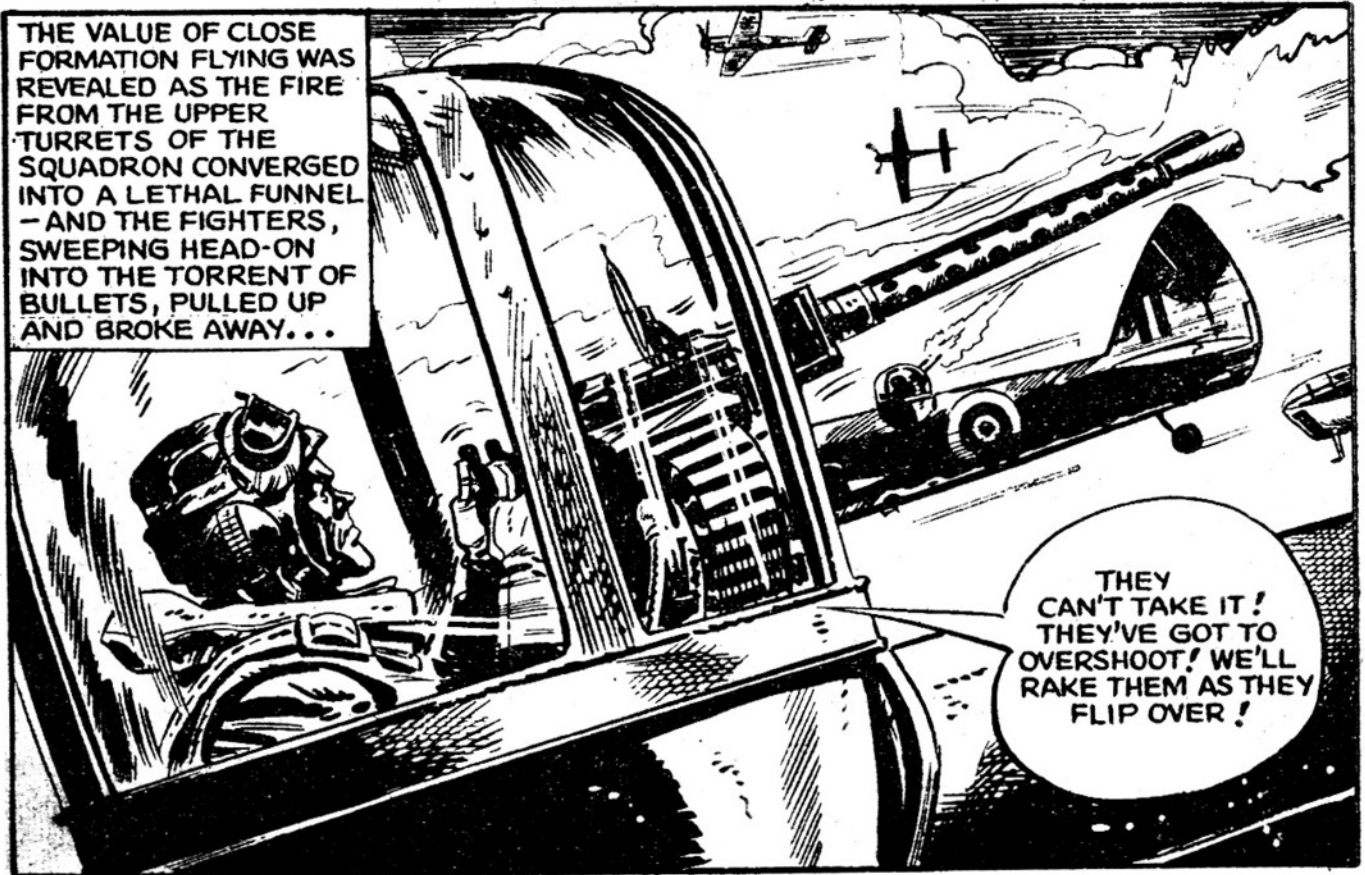
A MERCILESS DOOM STRUCK 'G FOR GEORGE', LIMPING ON ONE ENGINE BEHIND THE OTHERS...



GEORGE HAS BOUGHT IT!

LIKE VULTURES, THEY PICK ON THE STRAGGLERS!

THE VALUE OF CLOSE FORMATION FLYING WAS REVEALED AS THE FIRE FROM THE UPPER TURRETS OF THE SQUADRON CONVERGED INTO A LETHAL FUNNEL — AND THE FIGHTERS, SWEEPING HEAD-ON INTO THE TORRENT OF BULLETS, PULLED UP AND BROKE AWAY...



ARKWRIGHT GLANCED UP AS A FIGHTER STREAKED OVERHEAD. THERE, ON THE MESSERSCHMITT'S SLATE-GREY BODY, WERE SPECIAL MARKINGS HE HAD KNOWN WELL IN THE DAYS WHEN HE HAD FLOWN FOR ANOTHER COUNTRY UNDER ANOTHER NAME — AND THE REALISATION STRUCK HIM LIKE A HAMMERBLOW...



The Crowded Sky

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IT WAS ONLY THEN THAT THE FULL HORROR OF WAR CAME HOME TO ARKWRIGHT — FOR EVEN AS HE RECOGNISED THE YELLOW LETTERS, A MURDEROUS CONE OF FIRE FROM THREE BRITISH TURRETS CLOSED ON THE ENEMY FIGHTER . . .



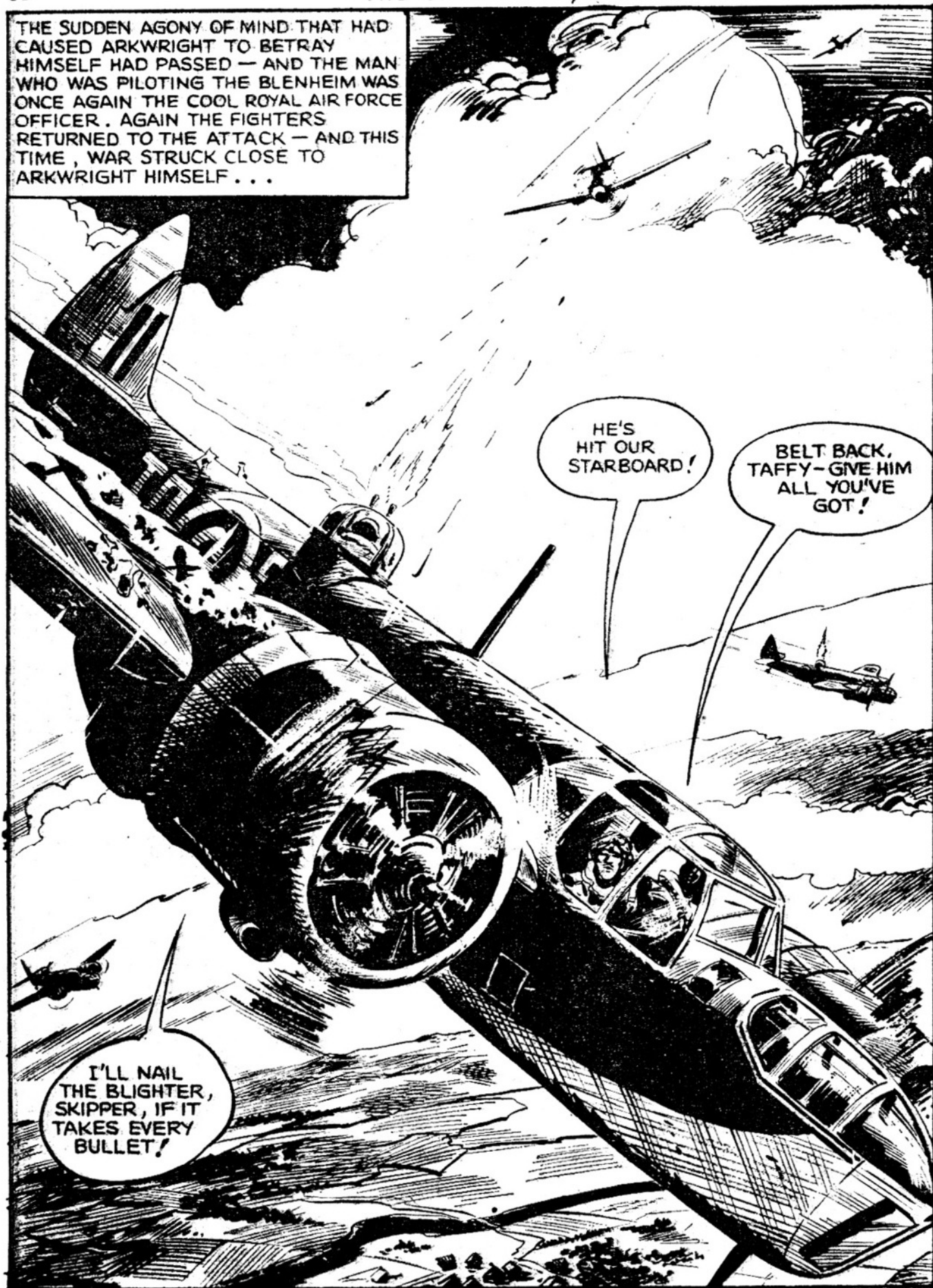
BUT AS ARKWRIGHT'S INCREDIBLE SHOUT CRACKLED OVER THE INTERCOM, THE ME-109 EXPLODED! FRAGMENTS OF WHIRLING METAL RAINED BACK THROUGH THE THUNDERING BOMBERS . . .



THE WELSH GUNNER HAD HEARD NOTHING ABOVE THE CHATTER OF HIS BROWNING'S. BUT JOHNNIE STOWELL HAD HEARD HIS SKIPPER'S SHOUT. HE SWUNG ROUND TO LOOK AT ARKWRIGHT CURIOUSLY — BUT THE OTHER HAD RECOVERED HIS COMPOSURE AGAIN . . .



THE SUDDEN AGONY OF MIND THAT HAD CAUSED ARKWRIGHT TO BETRAY HIMSELF HAD PASSED — AND THE MAN WHO WAS PILOTING THE BLENHEIM WAS ONCE AGAIN THE COOL ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICER. AGAIN THE FIGHTERS RETURNED TO THE ATTACK — AND THIS TIME, WAR STRUCK CLOSE TO ARKWRIGHT HIMSELF . . .



HE'S
HIT OUR
STARBOARD!

BELT BACK,
TAFFY—GIVE HIM
ALL YOU'VE
GOT!

I'LL NAIL
THE BLIGHTER,
SKIPPER, IF IT
TAKES EVERY
BULLET!

THEN, AS RAPIDLY AS THEY HAD COME — THE FIGHTERS WERE GONE — AND THE BOMBERS CONTINUED ON THEIR WAY TOWARDS BASE. ARKWRIGHT, WITH ONLY ONE GOOD ENGINE, HAD FALLEN BEHIND AND BELOW THE FORMATION . . .

I JUST DON'T GET IT, SKIP! THAT MESSERSCHMITT — IT WAS THE LATEST VERSION OF THE ONE-O-NINE, WITH SPECIAL MARKINGS — YET YOU KNEW IT AT ONCE, AND EVEN CALLED OUT THE NAME OF THE PILOT — METTERLING, YOU SAID HE WAS . . .

FORGET IT, JOHNNIE!



BUT JOHNNIE STOWELL KNEW THAT ARKWRIGHT COULD NEVER HAVE LEARNED THESE THINGS IN SWITZERLAND . . .

YOU TALK LIKE A GERMAN — YOU SEEM TO KNOW A LOT ABOUT THE LUFTWAFFE — AND YOU WERE A SKILLED PILOT BEFORE YOU JOINED THIS LOT! NOW JUST *WHAT* DOES THAT ADD UP TO . . .!

THE PAST DOESN'T MATTER ANY MORE, JOHNNIE! SOMEDAY I'LL TELL YOU A FEW THINGS — BUT NOT NOW . . .

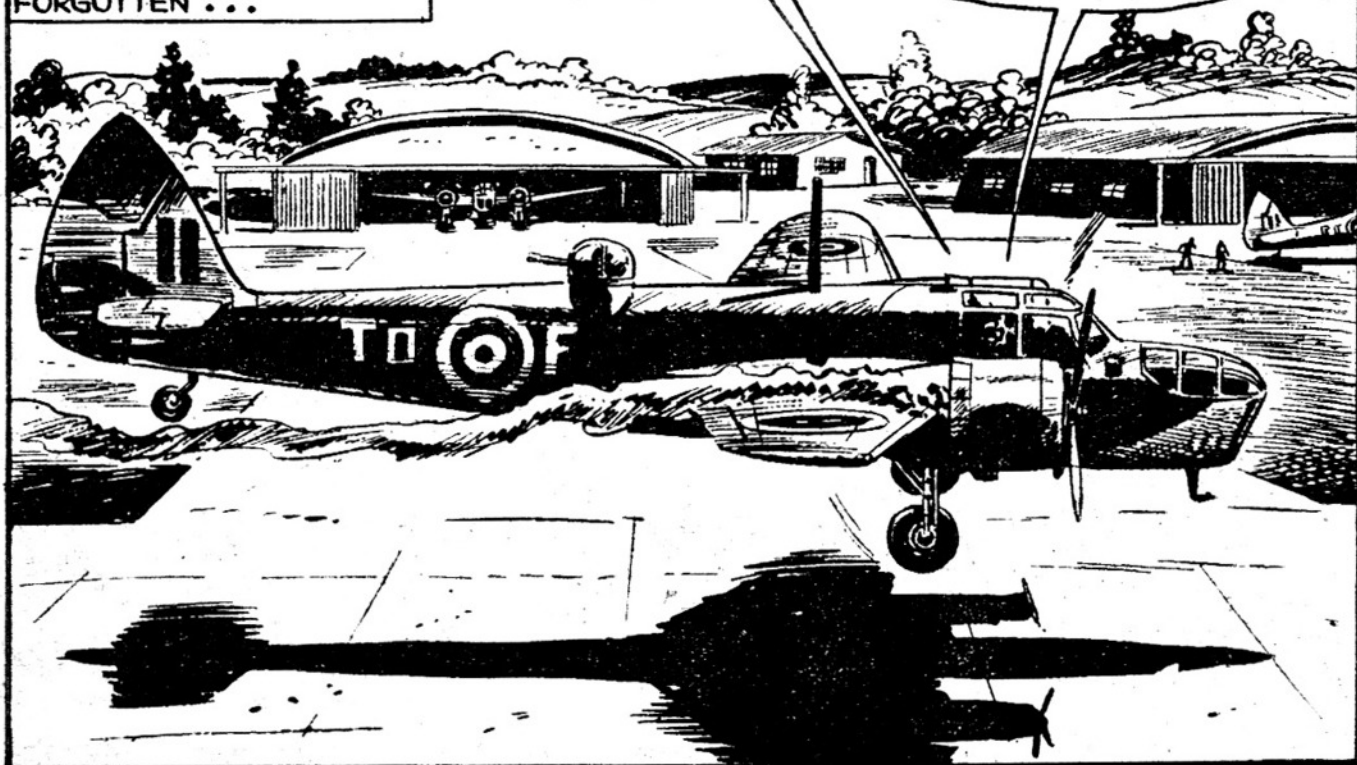


The Crowded Sky

THEY CAME IN TO A TRICKY LANDING, THEIR MINDS ONCE AGAIN ON THE BUSINESS OF WAR, PERSONAL MATTERS FORGOTTEN ...

THE STARBOARD WHEEL IS DOWN, ALL RIGHT — BUT WILL IT HOLD!

CONTROL ARE TAKING THE PESSIMISTIC VIEW! I SEE THE FIRE BUGGY AND THE BONE WAGON STANDING BY.



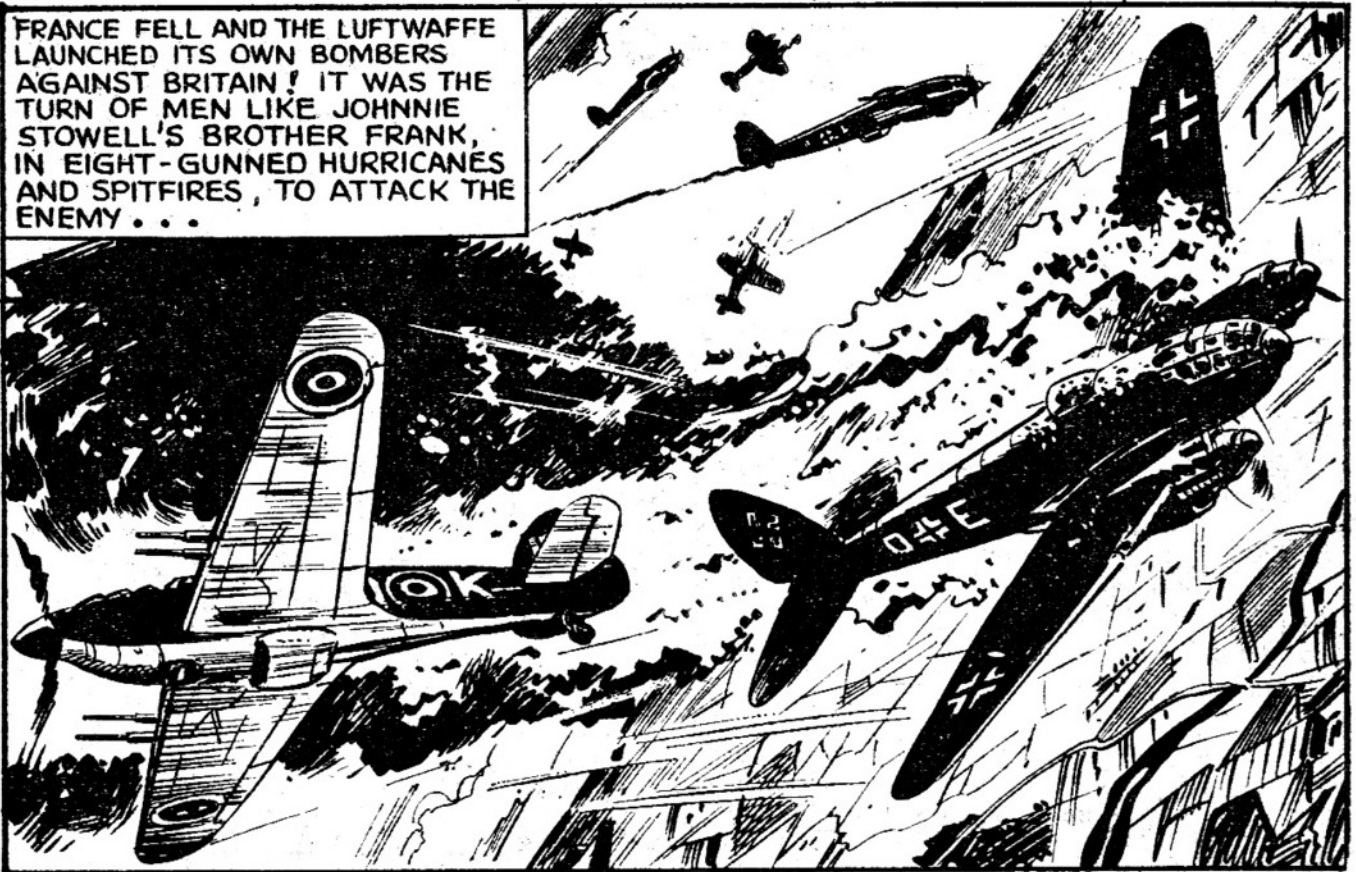
FOR THE REST OF THAT GRIM, EVENTFUL MONTH OF 1940, THE SQUADRON HARASSED THE ENEMY IN FRANCE — AND THEIR BLENHEIMS WERE ON PATROL NEAR THE BEACHES OF DUNKIRK DURING THE GREAT EVACUATION ...

STUKAS!

LET'S GET AMONGST THEM!



FRANCE FELL AND THE LUFTWAFFE LAUNCHED ITS OWN BOMBERS AGAINST BRITAIN! IT WAS THE TURN OF MEN LIKE JOHNNIE STOWELL'S BROTHER FRANK, IN EIGHT-GUNNED HURRICANES AND SPITFIRES, TO ATTACK THE ENEMY . . .



BUT IN BOMBER COMMAND, THE SPIRIT WAS — *RETALIATE!* IN EARLY 1941, A DARING DAYLIGHT RAID ON COLOGNE WAS PLANNED AND ARKWRIGHT'S BLENHEIM SQUADRON WAS ONE OF THE THREE THAT COMBINED FOR THE OPERATION...

I KNOW THAT DAYLIGHT MISSIONS ARE DICEY — BUT WE'VE BEEN GIVEN A STRONG FIGHTER COVER — AND I CAN REVEAL THAT THE AIRCRAFT WILL BE *WHIRLWINDS* — NEW, TWIN-ENGINE JOBS WITH A LONG RANGE AND COLOSSAL ARMAMENT — SO WE'LL BE WELL LOOKED AFTER.



The Crowded Sky

THE NEWS WAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST TO JOHNNIE STOWELL — AND LATER, HE DISCUSSED IT ENTHUSIASTICALLY WITH ARKWRIGHT . . .

MY BROTHER'S ON WHIRLWINDS, SKIPPER! HE WAS TRANSFERRED TO THEM FROM HURRICANES A COUPLE OF MONTHS AGO, BUT ASKED ME TO KEEP THE NEWS UNDER MY HAT!

THEN IT LOOKS AS IF THIS IS GOING TO BE A FAMILY TRIP, JOHNNIE!



PREPARATIONS FOR THE COLOGNE RAID PROGRESSED AND AT A MASS BRIEFING SESSION, PILOTS AND AIRCREW OF ALL THE FIGHTER AND BOMBER SQUADRONS INVOLVED WERE PRESENT . . .

AS LONG AS WE DON'T HIT SOLID FIGHTER OPPOSITION, WE SHOULDN'T HAVE TOO MUCH TROUBLE! THE BOMBERS WILL GO IN AS THREE WAVES WITH THE WHIRLWINDS COVERING US HIGH UP. ALTITUDES AS FOLLOWS . . .



THE GROUP CAPTAIN COVERED HIS SUBJECT THOROUGHLY - AND WHEN HE WAS FINISHED...

JUST A POINT, SIR! IF NO ENEMY FIGHTERS TURN UP, ARE WE PERMITTED TO TAKE THE WHIRLWINDS DOWN INTO THE ACTION?

YOU STAY WHERE WE PUT YOU, STOWELL! DON'T WORRY ABOUT JERRY - HE'LL TURN UP, ALL RIGHT! YOUR JOB IS PROTECT THE BOMBERS!



IT WAS FRANK STOWELL, COMMANDING A WHIRLWIND FLIGHT. WHEN THE BRIEFING WAS OVER, JOHNNIE LED ARKWRIGHT FORWARD TO MEET HIS BROTHER...

JOHNNIE, YOU SON OF A GUN - HAVEN'T SEEN YOU IN MONTHS! SO THIS IS WHERE YOU'VE DUG YOURSELF IN...

STILL THE SAME OLD FRANK! MEET MY SKIPPER, JOE ARKWRIGHT, BEST BOMBER PILOT THIS SIDE OF PARADISE!



The Crowded Sky

ARKWRIGHT HELD OUT HIS HAND AS FRANK STOWELL SWUNG TO GREET HIM - AND THE TWO MEN FROZE. FOR ARKWRIGHT FOUND HIMSELF FACING THE TALL, LEAN ENGLISHMAN WHO HAD CONFRONTED HIM SO LONG AGO, IN BERNE!

.YOU...!

YOU KNOW EACH OTHER?

YES... WE KNOW EACH OTHER!

FRANK STOWELL, IGNORING THE PROFFERED HAND, WAS STANDING WITH NARROWED EYES - AND ARKWRIGHT, IN SUDDEN PANIC, SPUN ON HIS HEEL, AND WALKED HURRIEDLY AWAY...

WHAT'S UP WITH ARKWRIGHT?

ARKWRIGHT!
THAT MAN'S NAME IS WEYMANN - AND HE'S A GERMAN!
I MET HIM IN BERNE AT THE OUTBREAK OF WAR - HE WAS FLYING A JUNKERS, THEN!
I NEVER FORGET A FACE, AND I CERTAINLY WOULDN'T FORGET THAT FACE!



BUT HE CLAIMS TO BE AN AMERICAN!

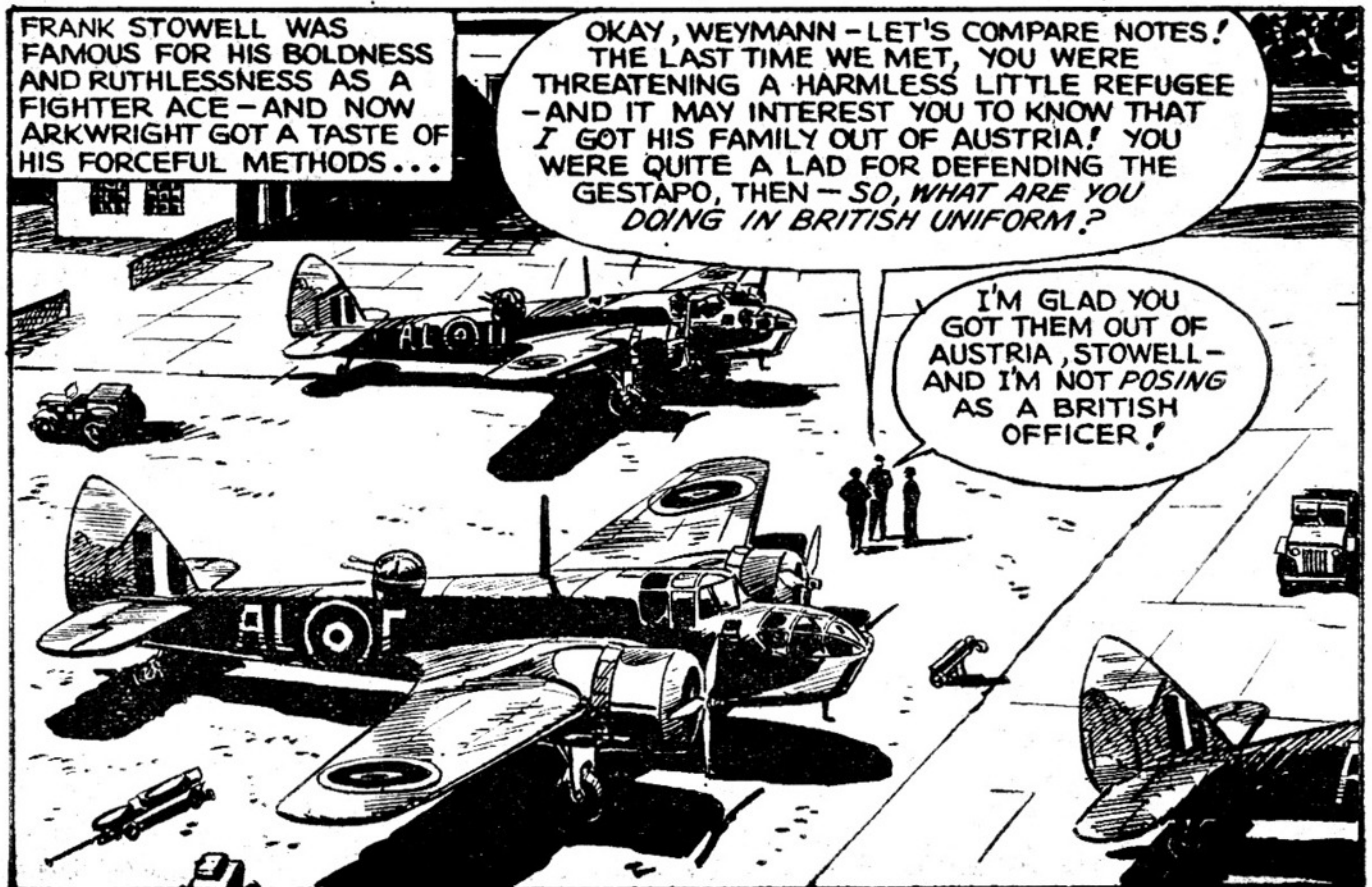
THEN THERE'S A ROTTEN APPLE IN THE BARREL SOMEWHERE! COME ON - WE'RE GOING TO LOOK INTO THIS!



WEYMANN - I WANT A WORD WITH YOU!

SAY YOUR PIECE - I'M LISTENING!

THEY FOUND ARKWRIGHT IN THE SHADOW OF THE BLENHEIMS...

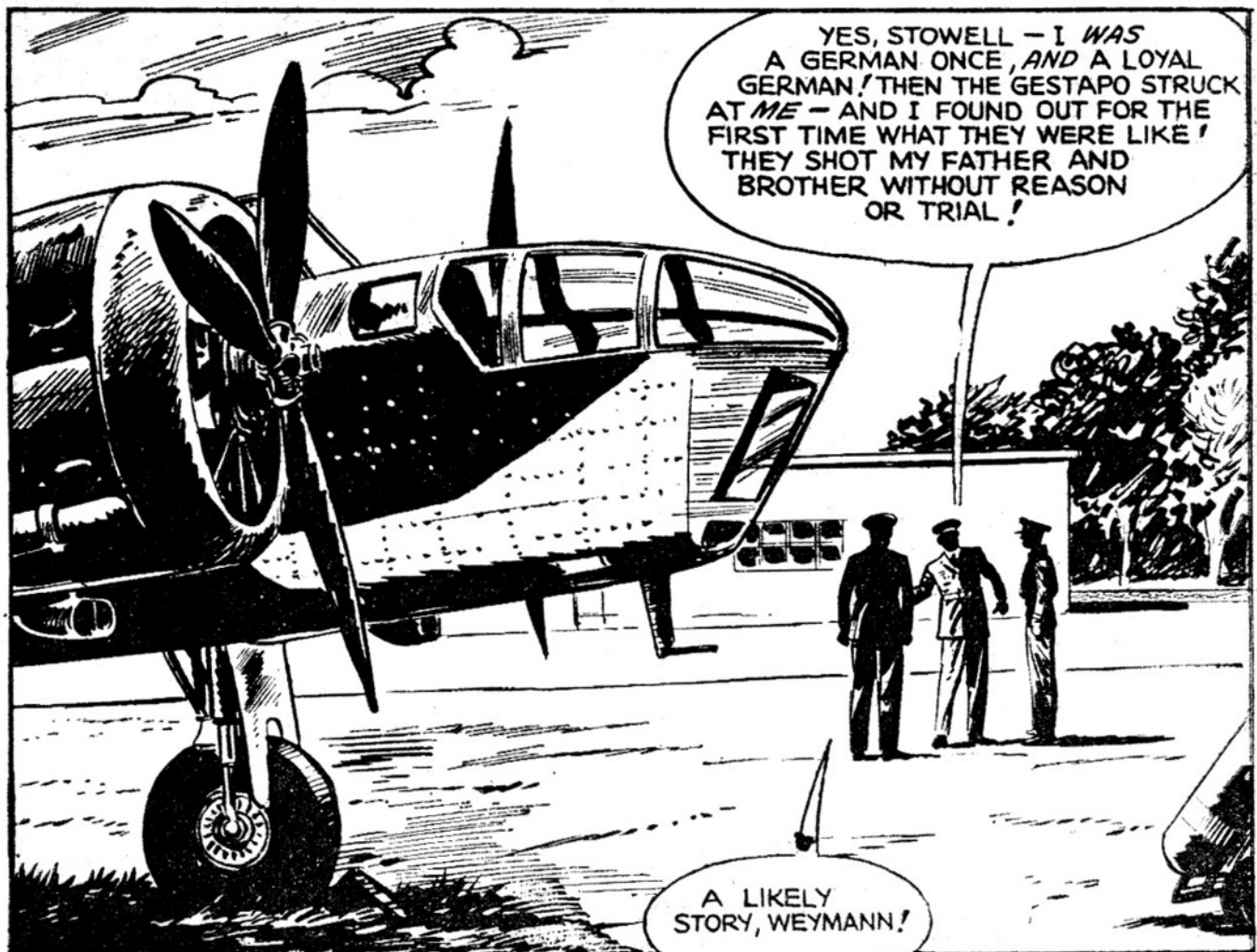


FRANK STOWELL WAS FAMOUS FOR HIS BOLDNESS AND RUTHLESSNESS AS A FIGHTER ACE - AND NOW ARKWRIGHT GOT A TASTE OF HIS FORCEFUL METHODS...

OKAY, WEYMANN - LET'S COMPARE NOTES! THE LAST TIME WE MET, YOU WERE THREATENING A HARMLESS LITTLE REFUGEE - AND IT MAY INTEREST YOU TO KNOW THAT I GOT HIS FAMILY OUT OF AUSTRIA! YOU WERE QUITE A LAD FOR DEFENDING THE GESTAPO, THEN - SO, WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN BRITISH UNIFORM?

I'M GLAD YOU GOT THEM OUT OF AUSTRIA, STOWELL - AND I'M NOT POSING AS A BRITISH OFFICER!

The Crowded Sky





The Crowded Sky

FRANK STOWELL STARED GRIMLY AT HIS BROTHER FOR A MOMENT — AND THEN STRODE AWAY...

WHERE'S HE GOING? WHAT WILL HE DO?

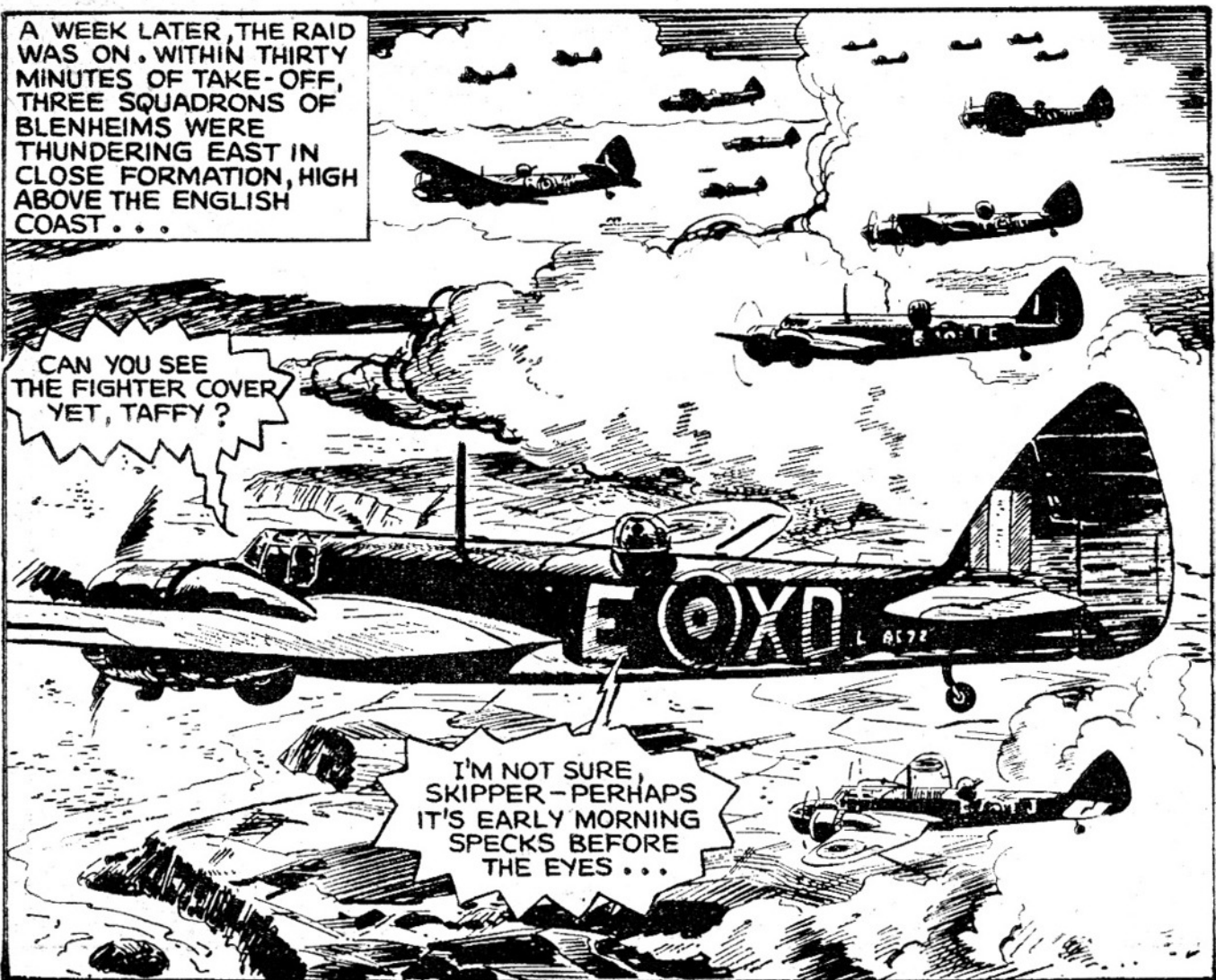
IT'S ALL RIGHT, ARKWRIGHT! I KNOW MY BROTHER — HE'LL HOLD HIS TONGUE! BUT THINGS WILL BE A BIT STRAINED BETWEEN US FROM NOW ON! LET'S DROP THE SUBJECT!



A WEEK LATER, THE RAID WAS ON. WITHIN THIRTY MINUTES OF TAKE-OFF, THREE SQUADRONS OF BLENHEIMS WERE THUNDERING EAST IN CLOSE FORMATION, HIGH ABOVE THE ENGLISH COAST...

CAN YOU SEE THE FIGHTER COVER YET, TAFFY?

I'M NOT SURE, SKIPPER — PERHAPS IT'S EARLY MORNING SPECKS BEFORE THE EYES...



BUT THE FIGHTER COVER WAS THERE, ALL RIGHT, AT SIXTEEN THOUSAND FEET.



IT WAS AN UNEVENTFUL SEA CROSSING, WITH THE RISING SUN FLARING DEAD AHEAD, AND GLEAMING ON THE PERSPEX WINDOWS OF THE MASSED RANKS OF GENTLY DIPPING AND SWAYING MACHINES. ARKWRIGHT, HIS MIND ON THE MISSION, GAZED CALMLY AHEAD, THE TENSION OF THE PAST WEEK FORGOTTEN — AND NEAR TO HIM, JOHNNIE STOWELL WAS GAZING UP AT THE HUGE, VAULTING SKY...

I SUPPOSE FRANK IS SOMEWHERE UP THERE, KEEPING AN EYE ON THINGS...



IT WAS NOT UNTIL THE FORMATIONS WERE WELL INTO GERMANY, HIGH ABOVE THE RUHR, THAT THE ENEMY REACTED TO THEIR THREAT . . .

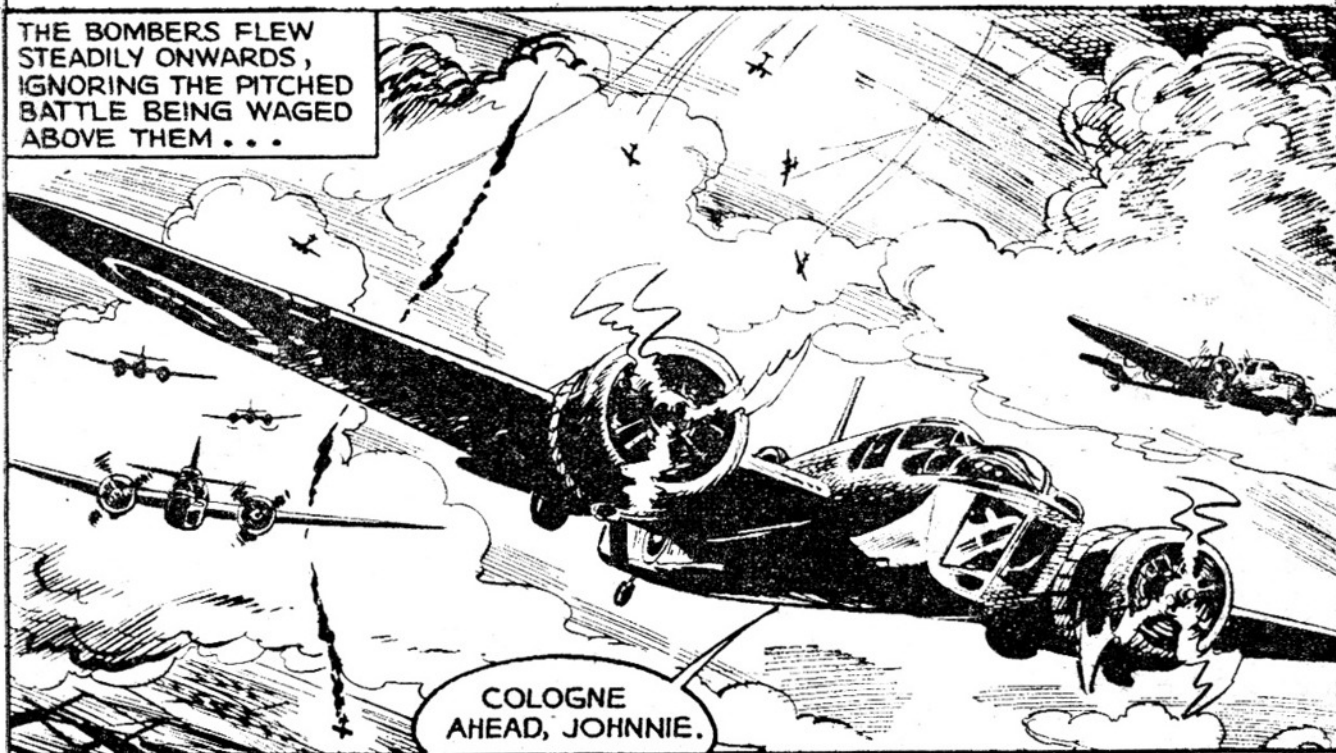


BUT THE WHIRLWINDS HAD ALREADY SEEN THE MESSERSCHMITT PACK - AND WITH ENGINES HOWLING AT SUPERCHARGED PITCH, THEY PEELED OFF TO INTERCEPT - EACH CARRYING A BATTERY OF FOUR OERLIKON CANNON IN ITS NOSE, THE DEADLIEST ARMAMENT IN THE SKY . . .

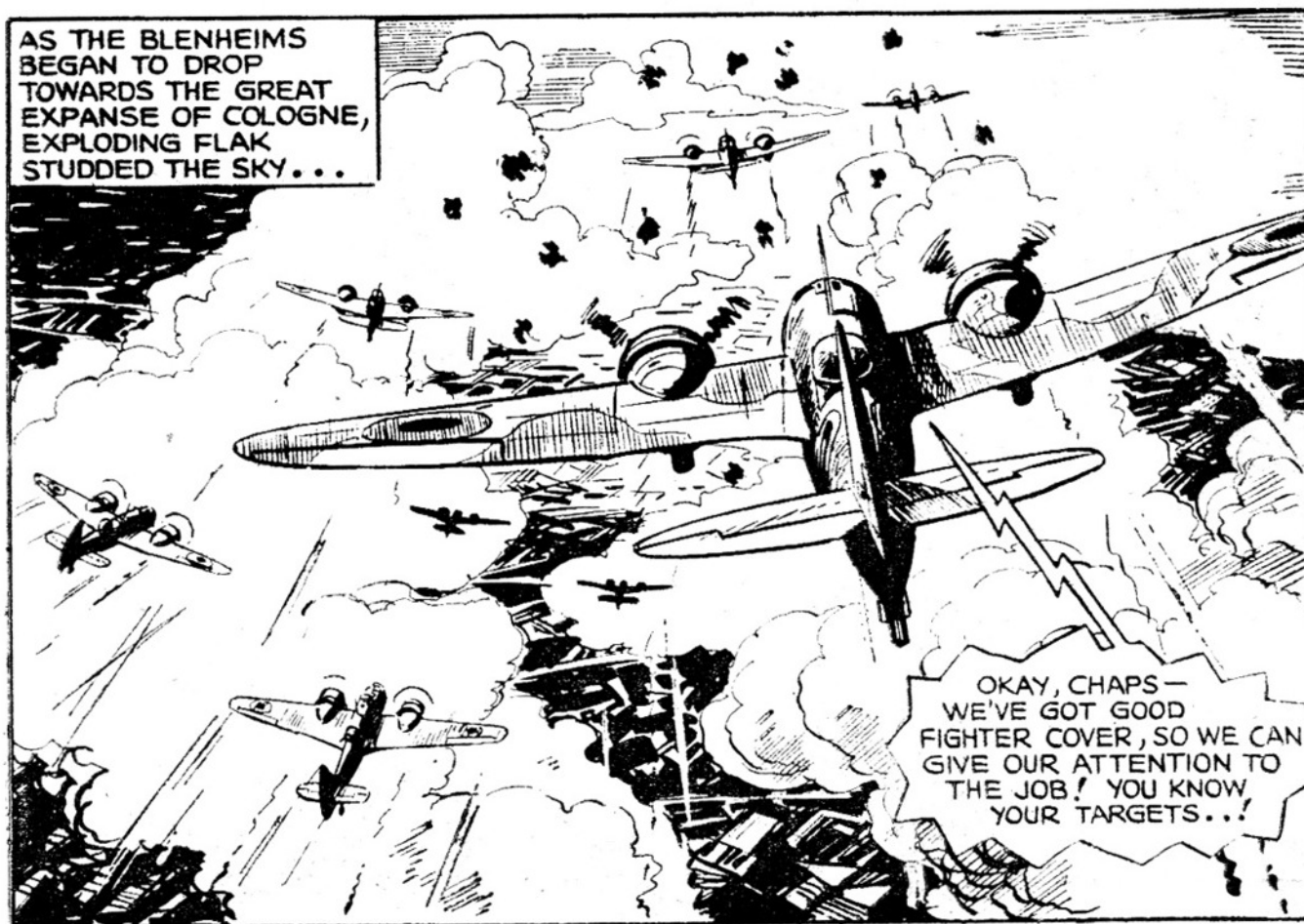


Chapter 4. BALE OUT!

THE BOMBERS FLEW STEADILY ONWARDS, IGNORING THE PITCHED BATTLE BEING WAGED ABOVE THEM...



AS THE BLENHEIMS BEGAN TO DROP TOWARDS THE GREAT EXPANSE OF COLOGNE, EXPLODING FLAK STUDDIED THE SKY...

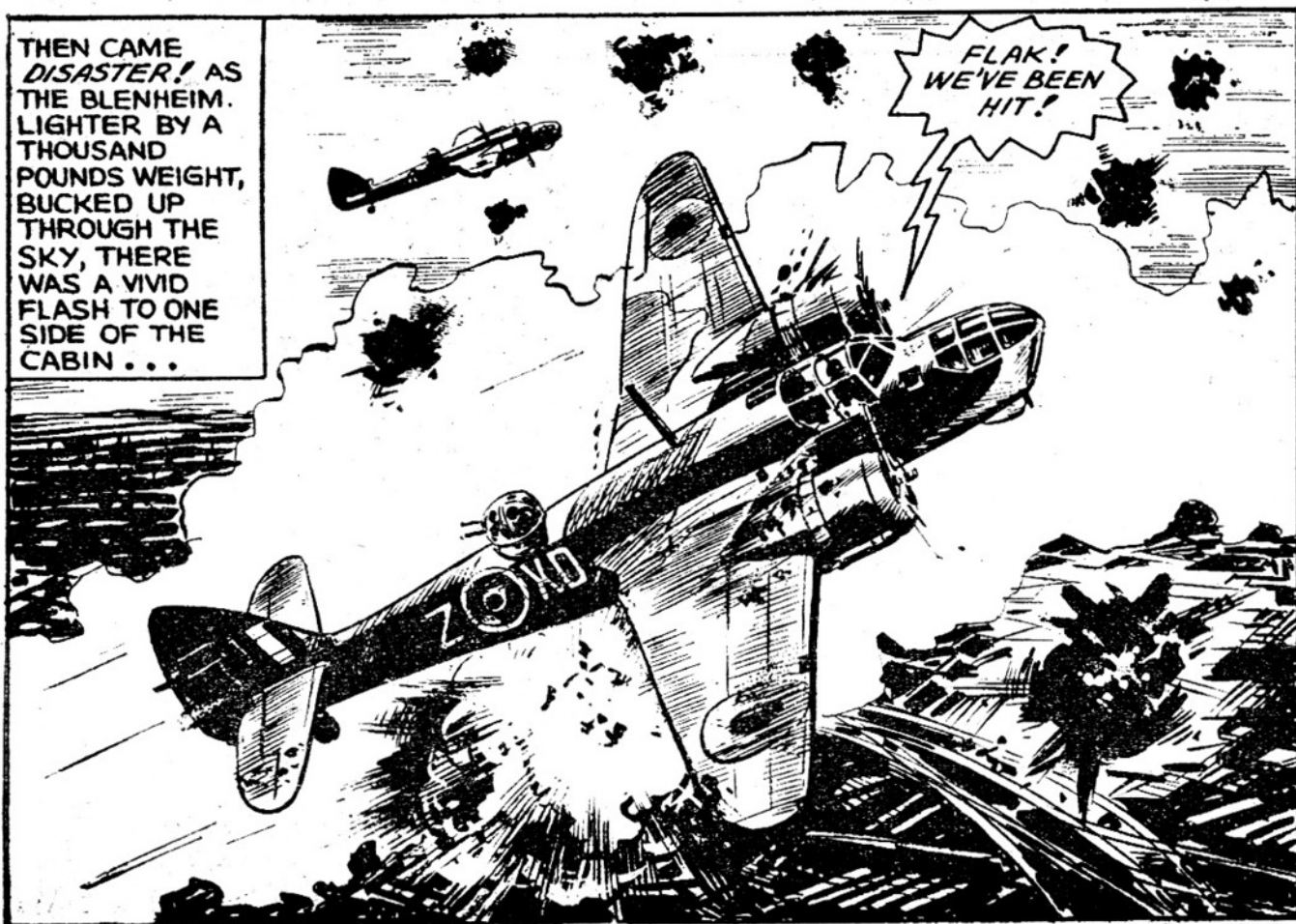


ARKWRIGHT LEVELLED OFF ON HIS BOMBING RUN. JOHNNIE WAS LYING IN THE TRANSPARENT NOSE; HIS EYE TO THE BOMB-SIGHT—AND TAFFY, IN THE TURRET AMIDSHIPS, WAS SWIVELLING HIS TWIN GUNS AND WATCHING THE HURTLING FIGHTERS WARILY...

STEADY—
STEADY—
BOMBS
AWAY!

THEN CAME *DISASTER!* AS THE BLENHEIM, LIGHTER BY A THOUSAND POUNDS WEIGHT, BUCKED UP THROUGH THE SKY, THERE WAS A VIVID FLASH TO ONE SIDE OF THE CABIN...

FLAK!
WE'VE BEEN
HIT!



AT THE SAME INSTANT, ARKWRIGHT FELT A SEARING BLOW ACROSS HIS LEGS — AND AS HE WRESTLED WITH THE VIBRATING CONTROL-COLUMN, HE SAW, THROUGH THE SHATTERED SIDE-PANELS OF THE CABIN, THAT THE PORT ENGINE WAS A REEKING SCRAP-HEAP . . .

WE'RE IN TROUBLE, JOHNNIE — BIG TROUBLE . . .

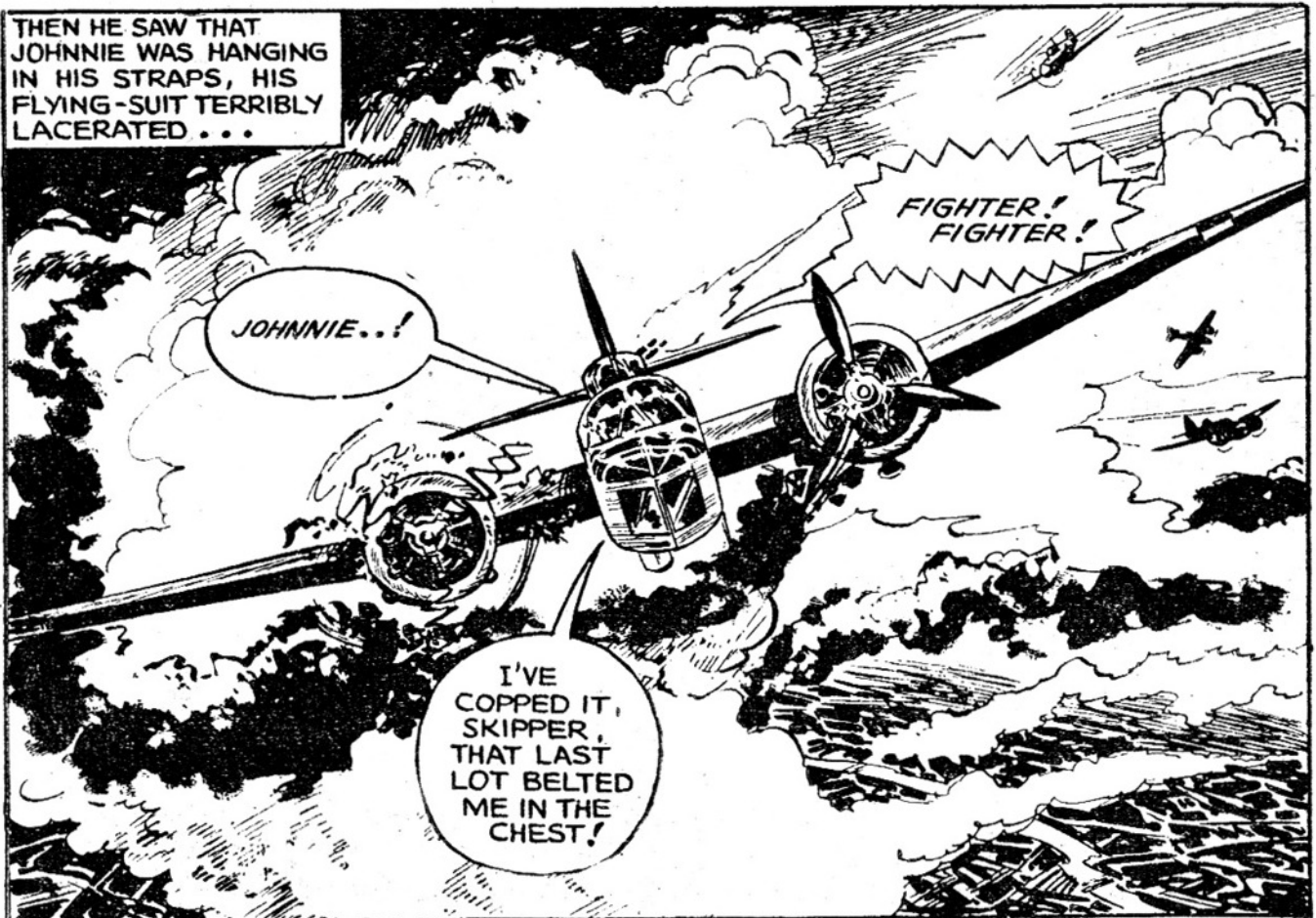


THEN HE SAW THAT JOHNNIE WAS HANGING IN HIS STRAPS, HIS FLYING-SUIT TERRIBLY LACERATED . . .

FIGHTER! FIGHTER!

JOHNNIE . . .!

I'VE COPPED IT, SKIPPER, THAT LAST LOT BELTED ME IN THE CHEST!



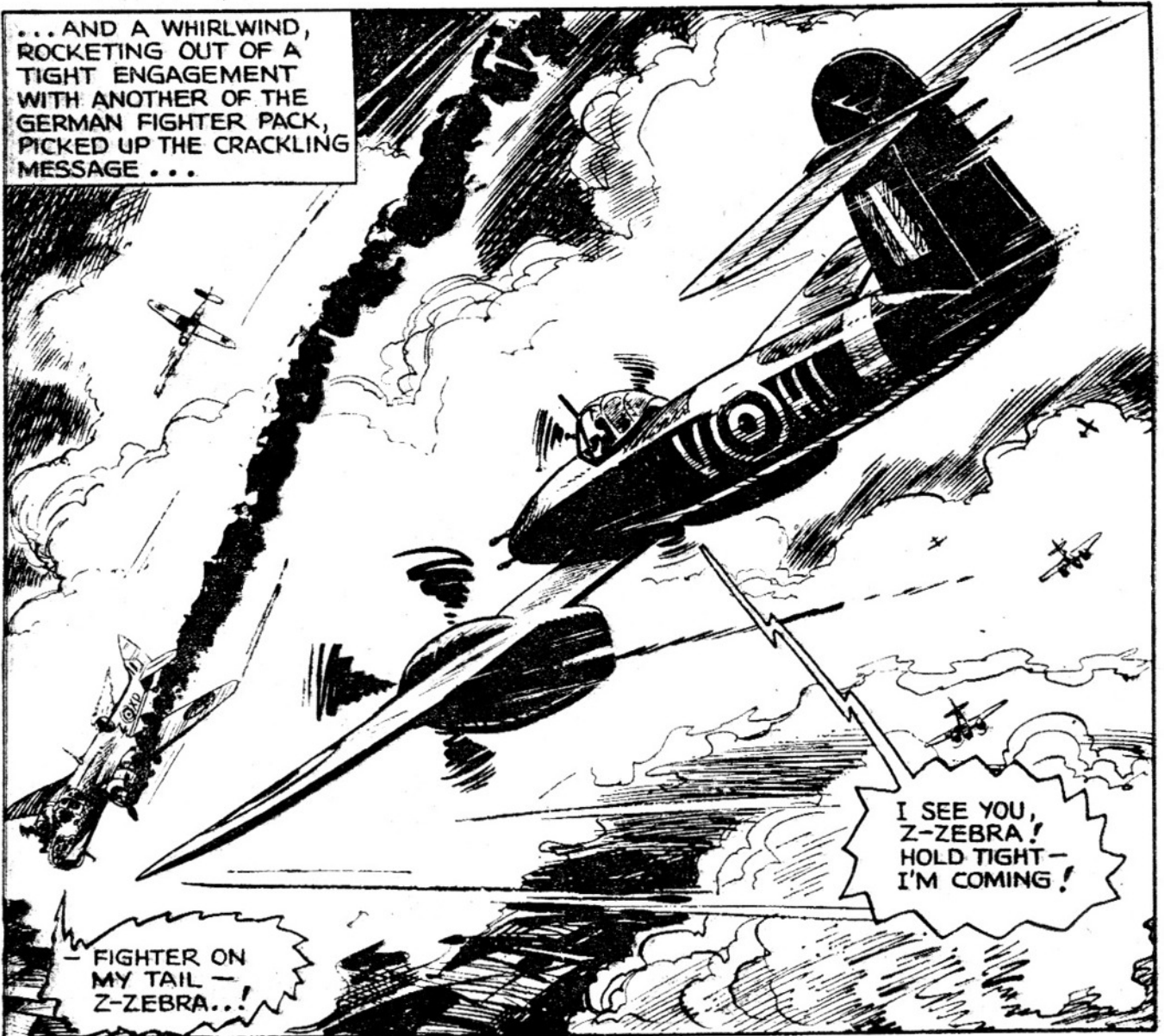
The Crowded Sky

AS THE CANNON SHELLS FROM THE DIVING ME-109 SLAMMED INTO FUSELAGE AND WINGS, ARKWRIGHT DRAGGED THE CRIPPLED BOMBER INTO A LABOURING TURN, AND DESPERATELY FLICKED OVER HIS R.T. SWITCH . . .

MAYDAY, MAYDAY!
Z-ZEBRA CALLING
WHIRLWINDS! FIGHTER
ON MY TAIL —
Z-ZEBRA —



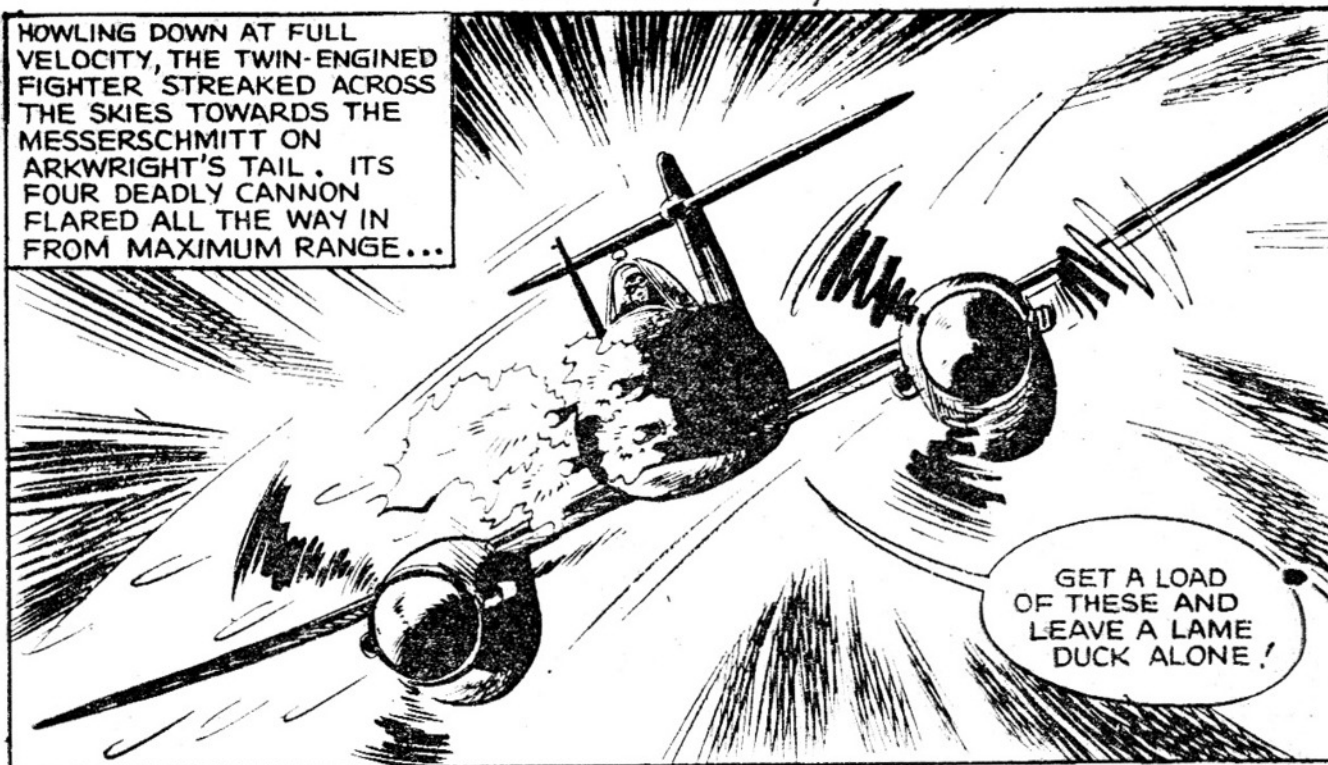
... AND A WHIRLWIND, ROCKETING OUT OF A TIGHT ENGAGEMENT WITH ANOTHER OF THE GERMAN FIGHTER PACK, PICKED UP THE CRACKLING MESSAGE . . .



I SEE YOU,
Z-ZEBRA!
HOLD TIGHT —
I'M COMING!

— FIGHTER ON
MY TAIL —
Z-ZEBRA...!

HOWLING DOWN AT FULL VELOCITY, THE TWIN-ENGINE FIGHTER STREAKED ACROSS THE SKIES TOWARDS THE MESSERSCHMITT ON ARKWRIGHT'S TAIL. ITS FOUR DEADLY CANNON FLARED ALL THE WAY IN FROM MAXIMUM RANGE...



GET A LOAD OF THESE AND LEAVE A LAME DUCK ALONE!

THE WHIRLWIND PILOT'S VOICE CAME CRACKLING OVER THE BLenheim'S R. T. AND JOHNNIE WAS ROUSED FROM A PAIN-FILLED COMA...



SKIPPER! THAT'S MY BROTHER'S VOICE! IT'S FRANK!

IN THAT LIGHTNING SWOOP, THE WHIRLWIND
BLASTED THE MESSERSCHMITT INTO A SPINNING
SHELL-TORN WRECK . . .

THANKS, STOWELL—
YOU'VE SAVED JOHNNIE'S
LIFE—AND MINE—THOUGH
JOHNNIE'S BEEN BADLY
KNOCKED ABOUT
BY FLAK!

WEYMANN!
IT'S YOU!

IT WAS TAKING
ARKWRIGHT ALL
HIS TIME TO HOLD
THE STRICKEN
BLENHEIM IN
LEVEL FLIGHT . . .

LISTEN, STOWELL!
WE'RE IN A BAD WAY! OUR
PORT ENGINE'S HAD IT,
AND JOHNNIE AND MYSELF
ARE BOTH WOUNDED—
JOHNNIE BADLY! IF WE
BALE OUT, THERE'S A
CHANCE THAT JOHNNIE
MIGHT GET HELP DOWN THERE
IN TIME—BUT THEY'LL SHOOT
ME . . .!

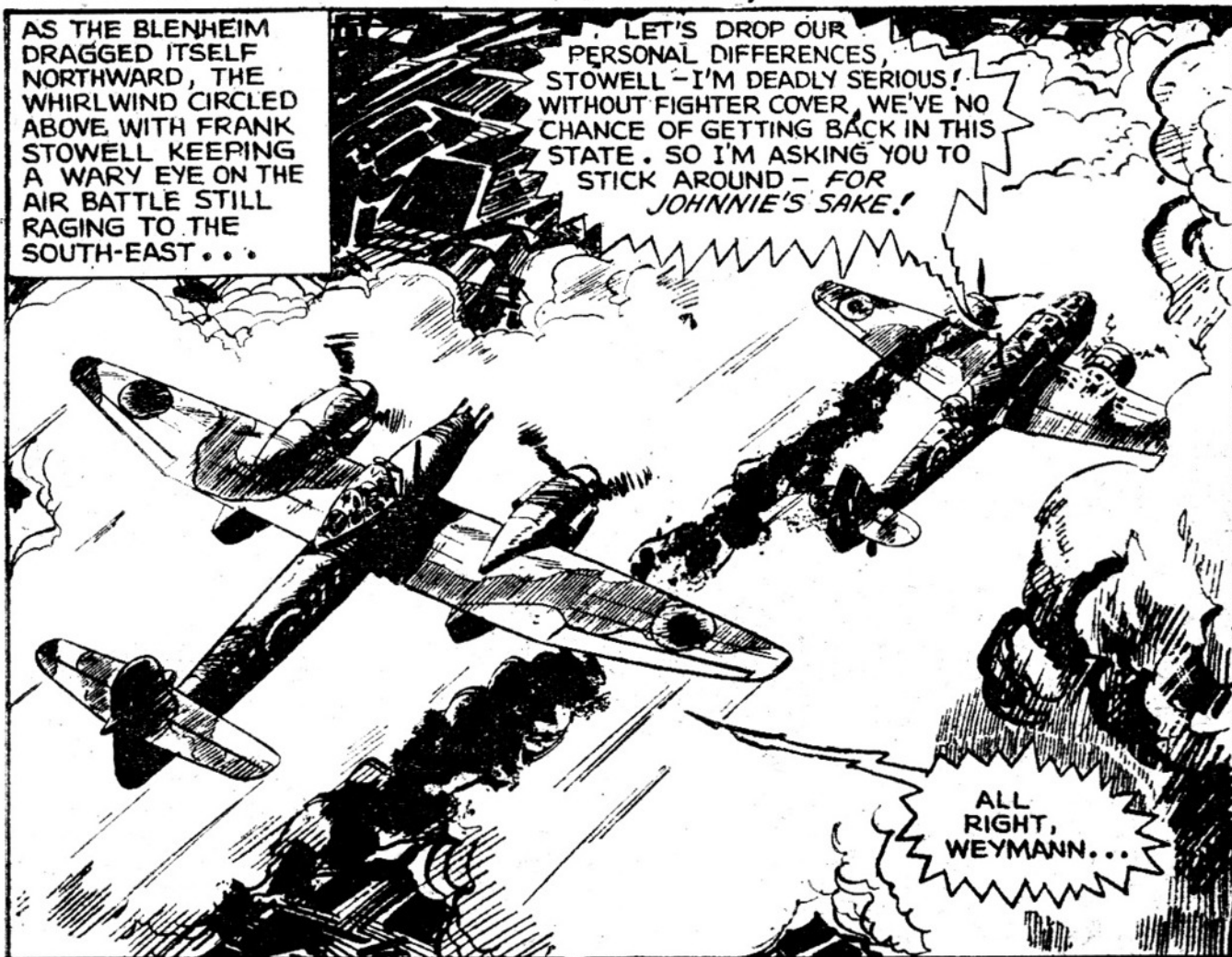
IT'S NO
MORE THAN
YOU DESERVE,
WEYMANN!



AS THE BLenheim DRAGGED ITSELF NORTHWARD, THE WHIRLWIND CIRCLED ABOVE WITH FRANK STOWELL KEEPING A WARY EYE ON THE AIR BATTLE STILL RAGING TO THE SOUTH-EAST...

LET'S DROP OUR PERSONAL DIFFERENCES, STOWELL - I'M DEADLY SERIOUS! WITHOUT FIGHTER COVER, WE'VE NO CHANCE OF GETTING BACK IN THIS STATE. SO I'M ASKING YOU TO STICK AROUND - FOR JOHNNIE'S SAKE!

ALL RIGHT, WEYMANN...



... BUT ONLY FOR JOHNNIE'S SAKE! IF IT WAS YOU ALONE DOWN THERE, WEYMANN, YOU COULD FRY, FOR ALL I CARE! THERE'S A DOZEN GOOD BRITISH PILOTS BACK IN THAT INFERNO WHO NEED MY CANNON RIGHT NOW!

THAT'S ALWAYS BEEN THE TROUBLE WITH MY BROTHER FRANK. HE NEVER CHANGES HIS MIND ABOUT ANYTHING, ONCE HE'S MADE IT UP!



The Crowded Sky

THE STRANGE SITUATION HAD RELAXED FRANK STOWELL'S FIGHTER INSTINCTS BY JUST THAT VITAL SPLIT-SECOND — AND IT WAS TAFFY THOMAS, EVER WARY IN HIS TURRET, WHO SUDDENLY SAW THE ENEMY FIGHTER DIVING OUT OF THE SUN . . .

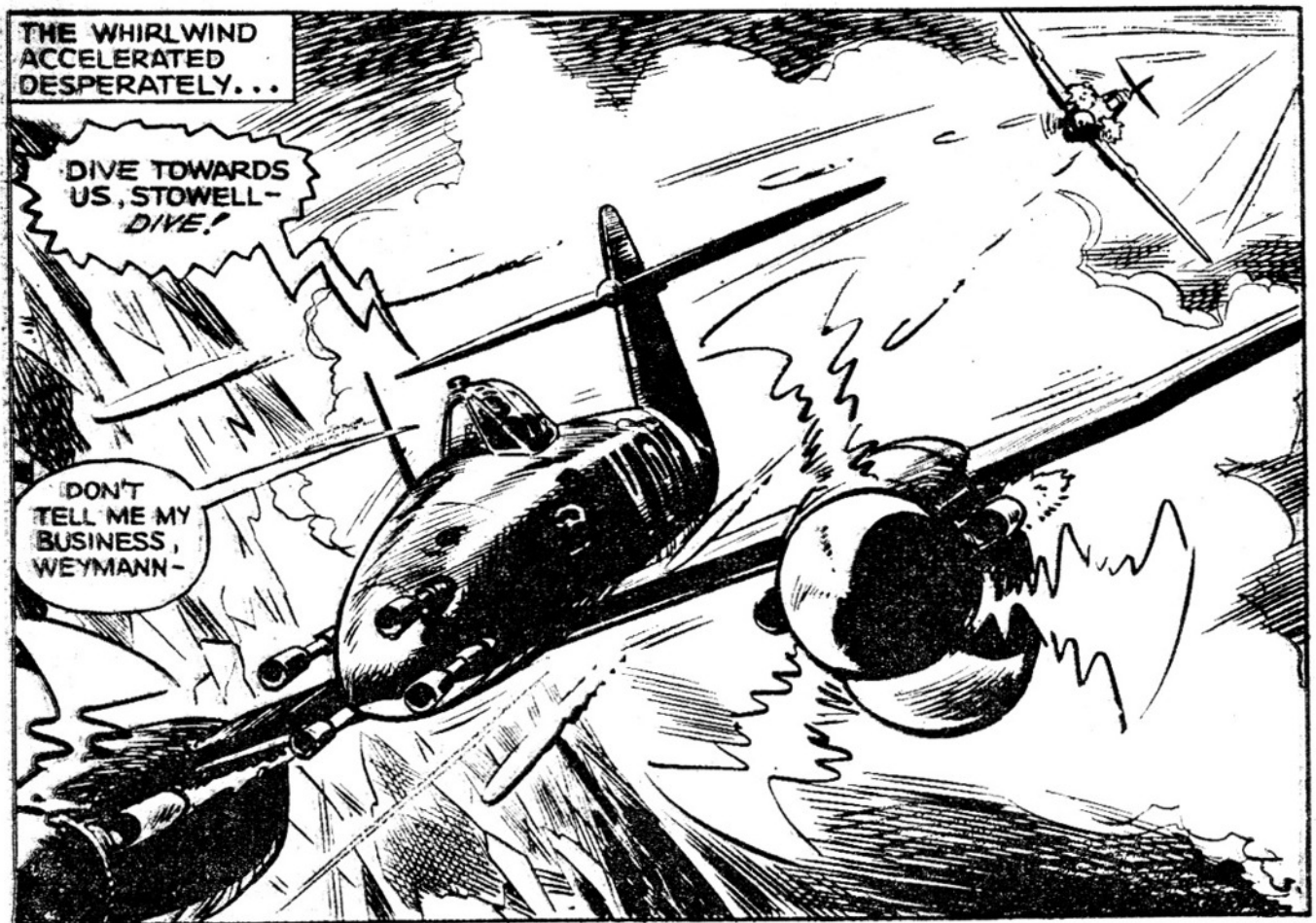
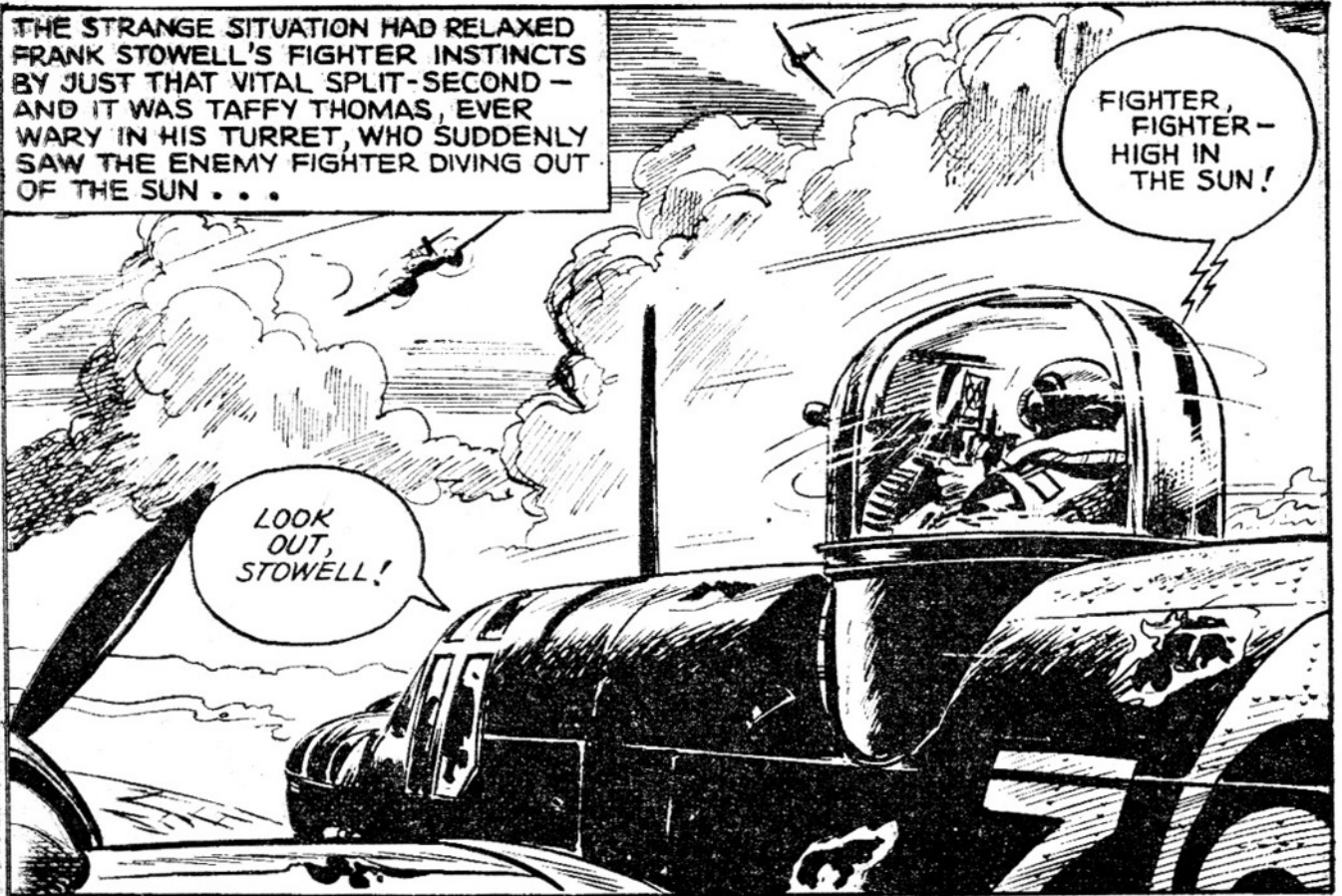
FIGHTER, FIGHTER — HIGH IN THE SUN!

LOOK OUT, STOWELL!

THE WHIRLWIND ACCELERATED DESPERATELY . . .

DIVE TOWARDS US, STOWELL — DIVE!

DON'T TELL ME MY BUSINESS, WEYMANN —

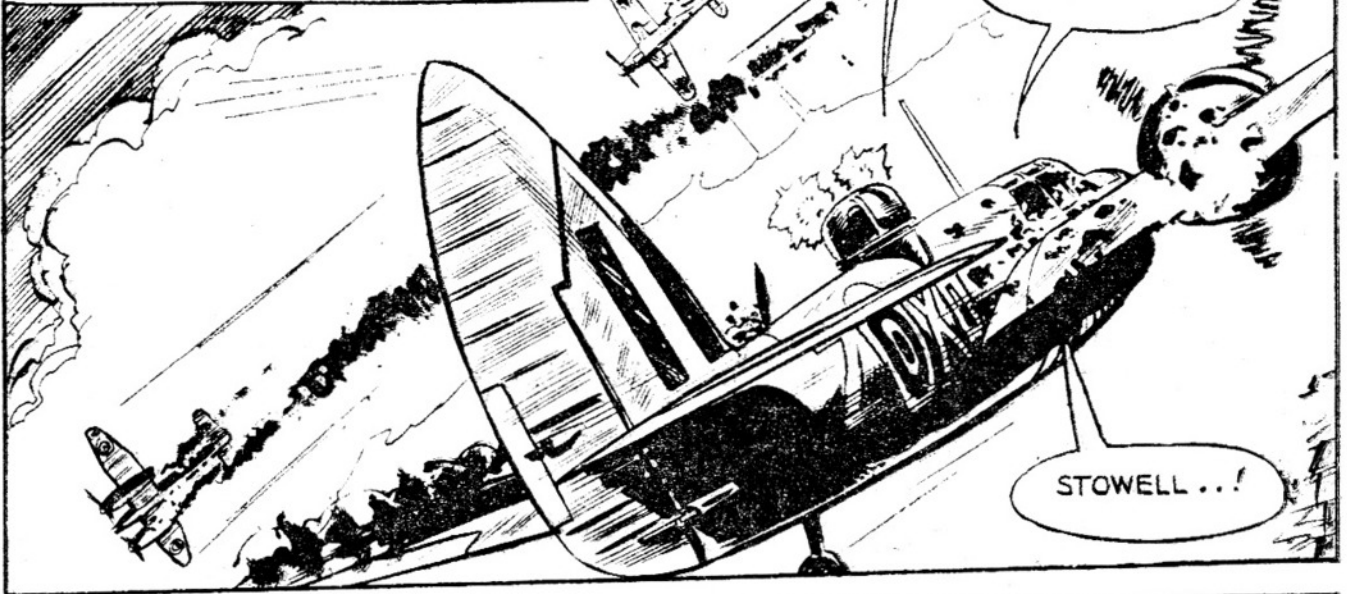


BUT THE SPLIT-SECOND DELAY HAD BEEN FATAL. RAKED AND TORN BY CANNON SHELLS, THE WHIRLWIND WAILED ACROSS THE SKY IN A STREAM OF SMOKE AND WRECKAGE - AND IT WAS TAFFY THOMAS WHO GOT THE ME-109 SQUARE IN THE SIGHTS OF HIS TWIN BROWNINGS.

GOT HIM!
GOT HIM!

FRANK...IT
CAN'T HAPPEN
TO FRANK-

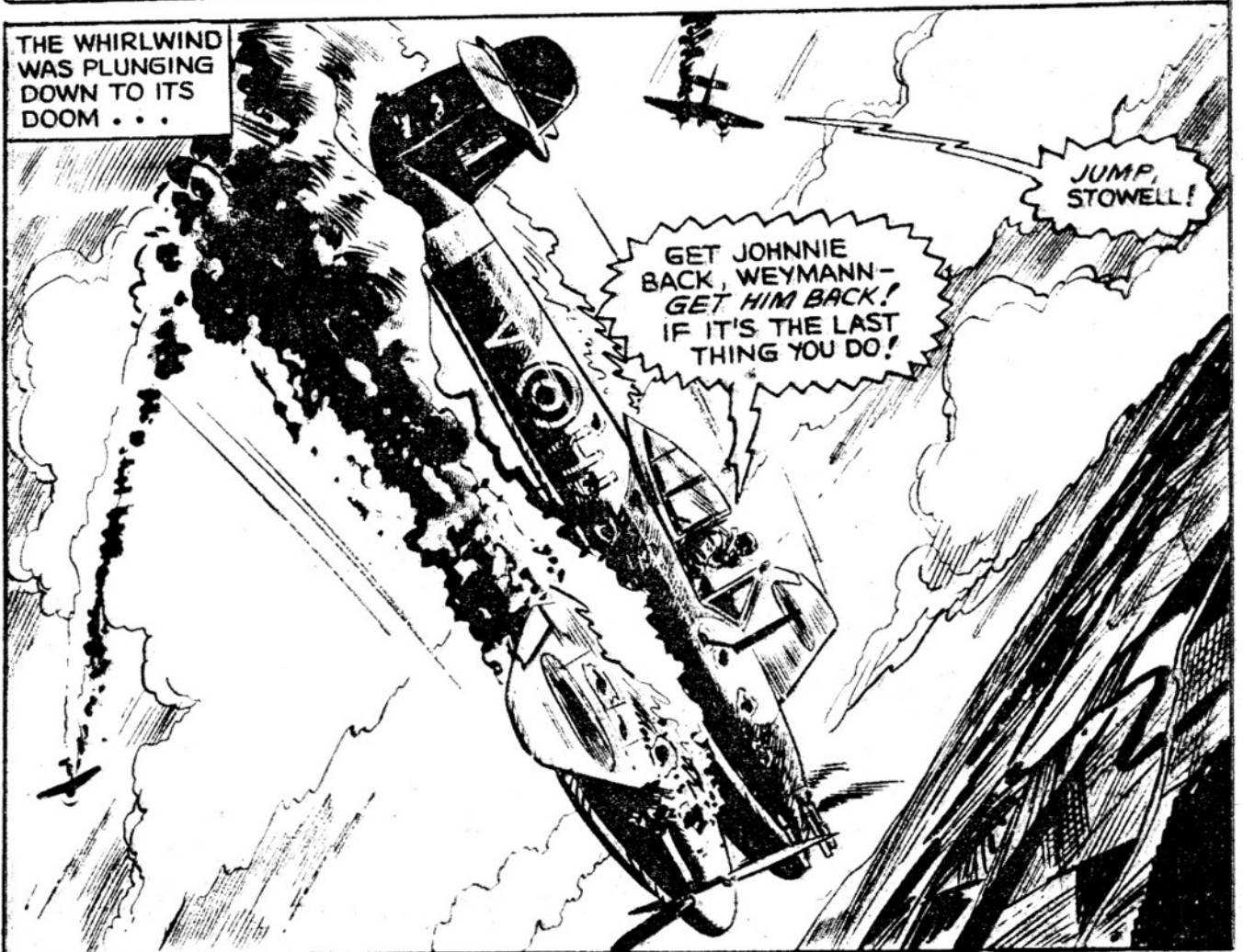
STOWELL...!



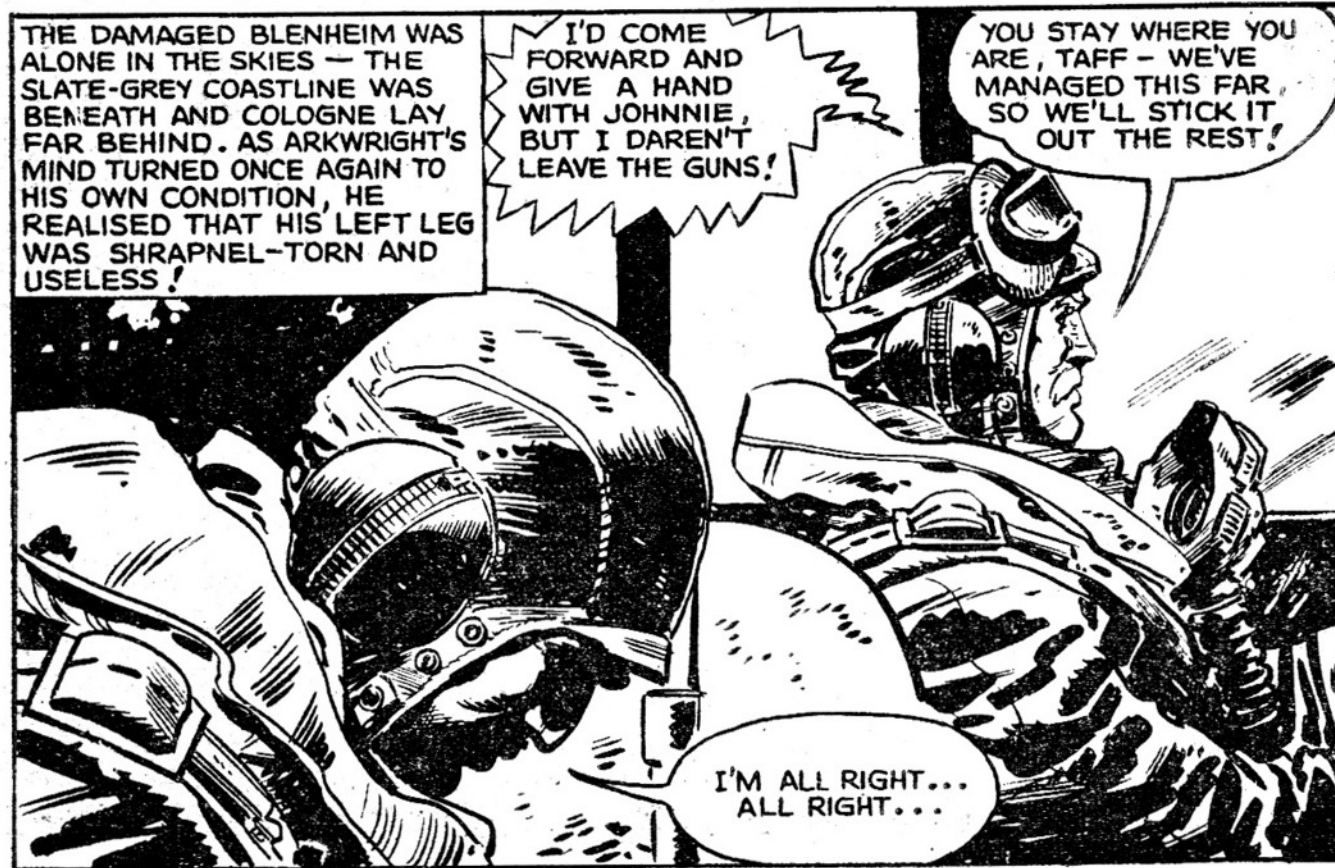
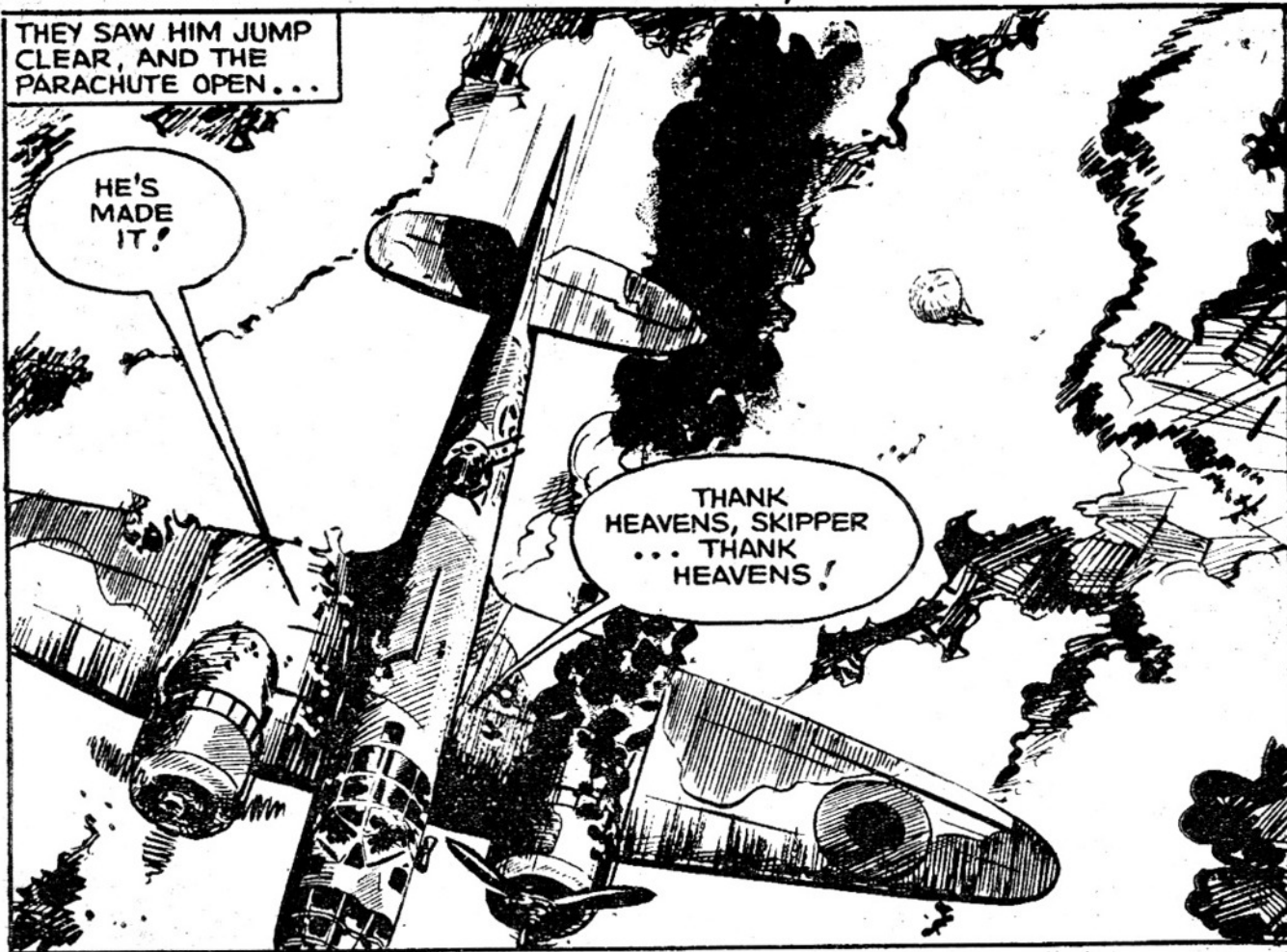
THE WHIRLWIND
WAS PLUNGING
DOWN TO ITS
DOOM...

JUMP,
STOWELL!

GET JOHNNIE
BACK, WEYMANN -
GET HIM BACK!
IF IT'S THE LAST
THING YOU DO!

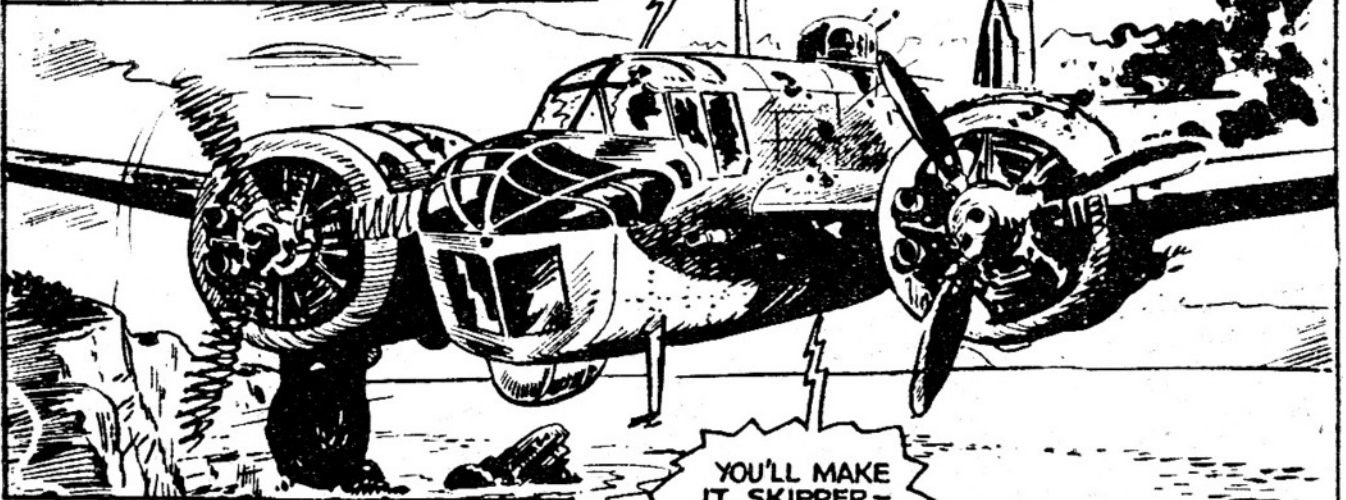


The Crowded Sky



FOR TWO, GRIM, PAIN-RACKED HOURS, ARKWRIGHT FOUGHT TO HOLD THE SHELL-PIERCED BOMBER STEADY ON ITS COURSE. THEY WERE AT TWO THOUSAND FEET, AND STILL DROPPING, WHEN AT LAST THE ENGLISH COAST CREPT IN TOWARDS THEM - AND ARKWRIGHT THANKFULLY PUMPED DOWN THE WHEELS. BUT ONLY THE STARBOARD WHEEL CAME DOWN!

THE SET-UP GETS DICIER EVERY MINUTE, TAFFY! NOW WE'VE GOT ONLY ONE WHEEL AS WELL AS ONE ENGINE!



YOU'LL MAKE IT, SKIPPER - YOU'VE PULLED US OUT OF WORSE JAMS!

BUT ARKWRIGHT KNEW THAT HE COULD NEVER TAKE THE RISK OF BRINGING THE MACHINE IN WITH JOHNNIE AND TAFFY ON BOARD. CALLING TAFFY FORWARD, HE GOT HIM TO LASH A CORD FROM JOHNNIE'S CHUTE RELEASE HANDLE TO ONE OF THE FITTINGS IN THE CABIN - AND AS THEY CAME IN TOWARDS BASE AT 1,500 FEET, HE GAVE THE ORDER TO BALE OUT.

THIS IS IT, TAFFY - PUSH JOHNNIE OUT FIRST - THEN OUT YOU GO AFTER HIM!



OKAY, SKIPPER - BUT WHAT ABOUT YOURSELF?

I'LL SEE IT THROUGH, TAFF -

AN ORDER WAS AN ORDER — AND JOHNNIE WENT OUT FIRST, FOLLOWED BY THE WELSHMAN...

Z-ZEBRA TO BASE — HAVE ORDERED CREW TO BALE OUT — BUT CAN'T BALE OUT MYSELF. I'M BRINGING Z-ZEBRA IN ON ONE WHEEL AND ONE ENGINE — STAND BY — STAND BY...!

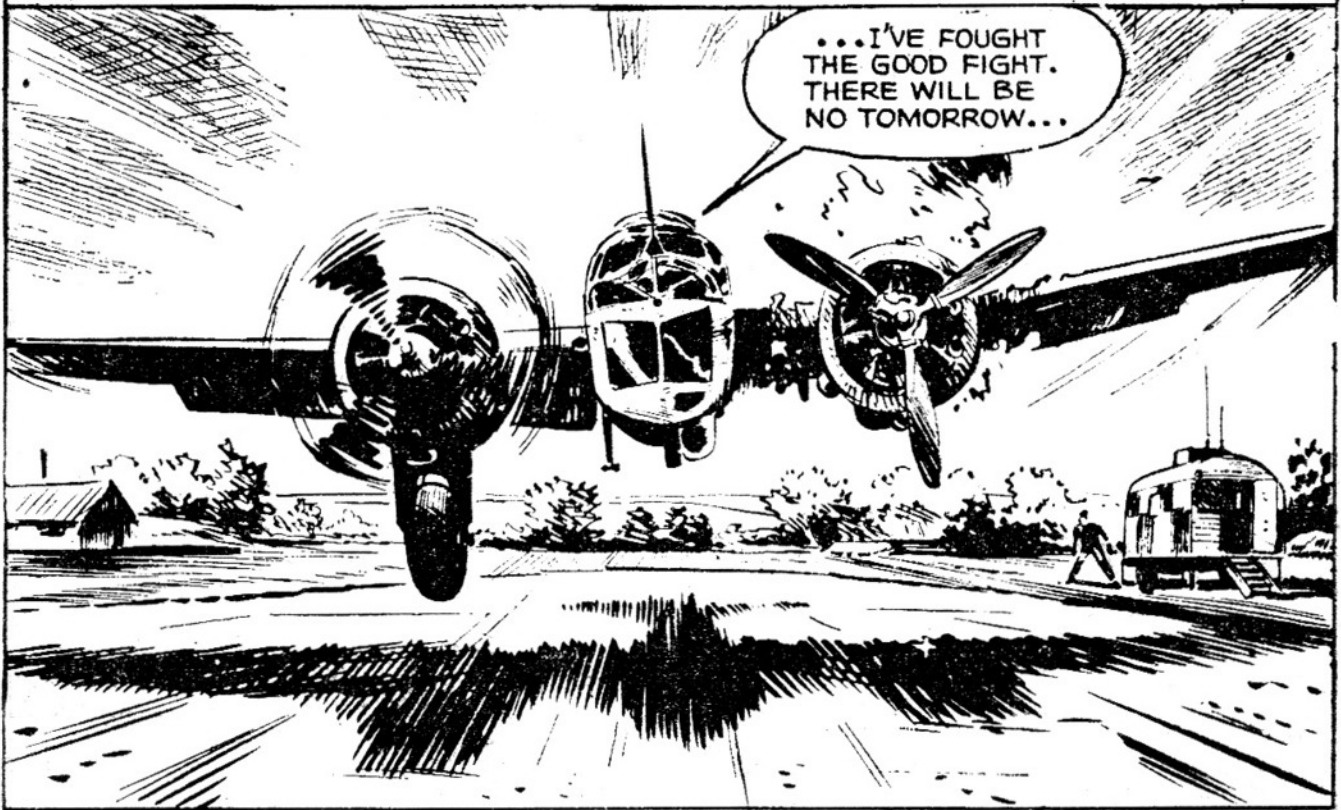


DIPPING THE SHATTERED NOSE, ARKWRIGHT CAME IN TOWARDS THE AIRFIELD, HIS HEAD SWIMMING WITH PAIN, HIS EYES BLURRED AND MISTY...

... NOW THE ONLY LIFE AT STAKE IS MY OWN! YOU ONCE SAID, MY KOMMANDANT, THAT YOUR PILOTS WERE LIKE THE ANCIENT SPARTANS — THEY CAME BACK *WITH* THEIR SHIELDS OR *ON* THEM! WELL, I'M COMING BACK WITH MY SHIELD *AND* ON IT!



THE LONE BOMBER STAGGERED IN LOW, AND THE WATCHERS IN THE CONTROL TOWER KNEW AT ONCE IT COULD NEVER MAKE IT! AS THEY WAITED TENSELY FOR THE PILE-UP, THEY SUDDENLY HEARD OVER THE R.T. AN INCREDIBLE THING — A SAD GERMAN FOLK-SONG, A TALE OF PLACES THAT WOULD NEVER BE SEEN AGAIN, SANG SOFTLY AND BITTERLY . . . AND WEYMANN WAS SINGING IT, ALMOST TO THE END . . .



WEYMANN WAS KILLED IN THE CRASH — BUT JOHNNIE AND THE WELSH GUNNER HAD BALED OUT SAFELY. WHEN JOHNNIE HAD RECOVERED SUFFICIENTLY TO SEE VISITORS — THE FIRST PERSON TO VISIT HIM WAS HIS C.O.

WELL, JOHNNIE, I'VE GOT NEWS FOR YOU ON TWO SCORES! FIRST, YOUR BROTHER FRANK IS ALIVE — IN A GERMAN LUFTSTALAG! AND SECOND, YOUR LATE SKIPPER, ARKWRIGHT, HAS BEEN AWARDED A POSTHUMOUS D.F.C.! THE VERY FACT THAT HE GOT HIS BLENHEIM HOME AT ALL WAS A SIGN OF BRAVERY AND DEVOTION TO DUTY OF A VERY HIGH ORDER. YOU OWE YOUR LIFE TO HIM, LADDIE!



...AND JOHNNIE STOWELL NEVER DID FORGET IT. IT WAS THREE MONTHS BEFORE HE WAS FINALLY RETURNED TO HIS OLD SQUADRON. ON HIS FIRST DAY BACK, HE STOOD ALONE FOR A WHILE IN A FAR CORNER OF THE AIRFIELD, AT A PLACE WHERE A LONE BLENHEIM, AFTER A HEROIC AND HOPELESS LANDING, HAD CRASHED.

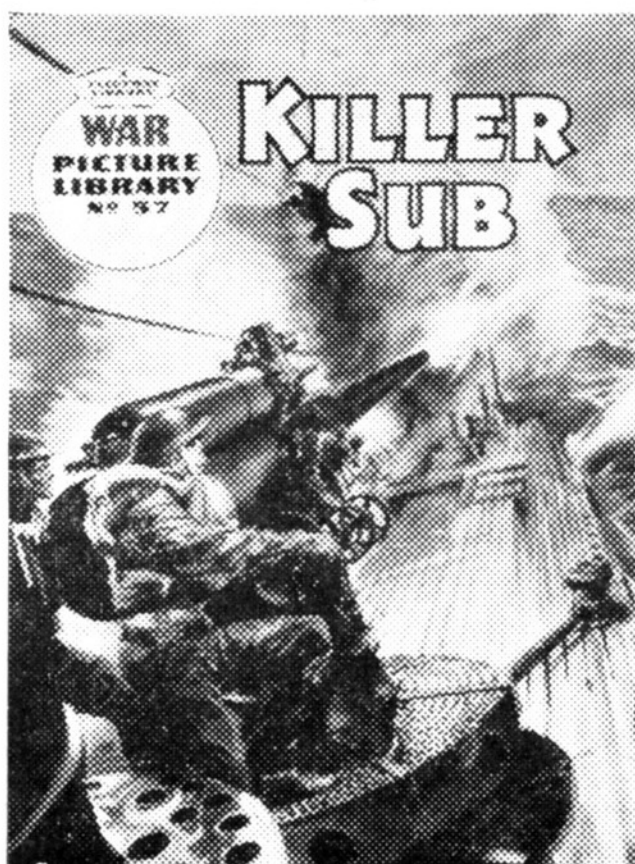
... I'VE KEPT YOUR SECRET, OLD FRIEND - AND I'LL KEEP IT UNTIL THE END OF THE WAR! FOR WE WERE A GREAT TEAM, AND I'LL STAND BY YOU, AS YOU STOOD BY ME! SOME THINGS WILL NEVER DIE, NOT AS LONG AS MEN KEEP THEM FRESH IN THEIR MEMORY! ARKWRIGHT OR WEYMANN, IT DOESN'T MATTER NOW - YOU FOLLOWED YOUR STAR TO THE END!



ALSO ON SALE NOW
FOR WAR THRILLS . . . ACTION . . . DRAMA . . .

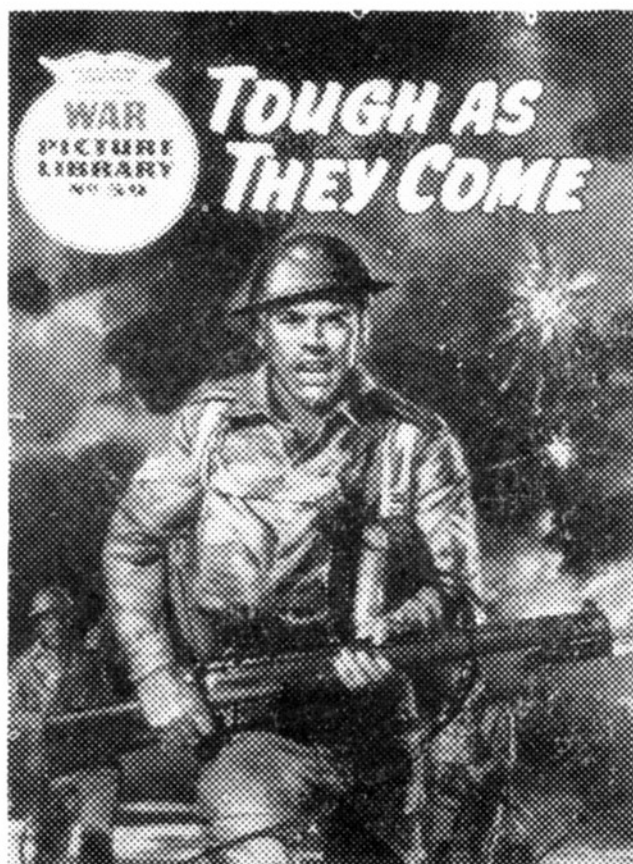
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